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BORDER FICTION: FRACTURE AND CONTESTATION IN POST-OSLO PALESTINIAN CULTURE

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BORDER FICTION: FRACTURE AND CONTESTATION IN POST-OSLO PALESTINIAN CULTURE

by

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BORDER FICTION: FRACTURE AND CONTESTATION IN POST-OSLO PALESTINIAN CULTURE

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This dissertation delves into a body of Palestinian literature, film, and art from the past two decades in order theorize the relationship between borders and their representations. In Israel and Palestine, a region in which negotiating borders has become a way of life, I explore the ways in which ubiquitous boundaries have pervaded cultural production through a process that I term "bordering." I draw on theoretical contributions from the fields of architecture, geography, anthropology, as well as literature and film studies to develop a conceptual framework for examining the ways in which authors, artists, and filmmakers engage with borders as a space to articulate possibilities of encounter, contestation, and transgression.

I argue that in these works, the proliferation of borders has called into question the Palestinian cultural and political consensus that created a shared set of narratives, symbols, and places in Palestinian cultural production until the last decade of the 20th century. In its place has emerged a fragmented body of works that create what Jacques

Rancière terms "dissensus," or a disruption of a cultural, aesthetic, disciplinary, and spatial order. Read together, they constitute what I term a "border aesthetic," in which literature, film, and art produce new types of spaces, narratives, and texts through the ruptures and fractures of the border. I trace the emergence of this aesthetic and the new genres and forms that distinguish it from earlier Palestinian literary, political, and intellectual projects through analyses of the works of Elia Suleiman, Sayed Kashua, Raba'i al-Madhoun, Emily Jacir, Yazid Anani, and Inass Yassin. In their attempts to grapple artistically with the region's borders, these authors, directors, and artists create new codes, narratives, vernaculars, and spaces that reflect the fragmentation wrought by pervasive boundaries. These works, fluent in multiple mediums, genres, and languages, reveal both the possibilities and the limits of this aesthetic, as they seek to contest borders but nevertheless remain bound by them.

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A Note on Translation and Transliteration

In this dissertation I have used published translations of Arabic and Hebrew texts when available, except instances in which I used my own translation to emphasize certain textual features. In particular, I used the English translations of two works by Sayed Kashua, *Dancing Arabs*, trans. Miriam Shlesinger, and *Second Person Singular*, trans. Mitch Ginsburg. Though a translation of Raba'i al-Madhoun's *The Lady from Tel Aviv* by Elliot Colla was published in summer 2013, it was not available at the time of writing, thus all translations of this novel are my own.

I base all transliterations of Modern Standard Arabic on the system used by the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, and I have transliterated the glottal stop [ء] as ['] and the consonant *'ayn* [ع] as [']. Likewise, I base transliterations of Hebrew on the standard used by the Library of Congress. I have transliterated the Hebrew consonant *Aleph* [א] as ['] and the consonant *'ayn* [ע] as ['], in the same manner as their Arabic equivalents, in order to preserve the parallels between the two languages. To simplify readability, I have used the most commonly accepted English spelling for names of people and places.

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Productive Paradox of Borders in Palestine and Israel

The etymology of the Arabic word for "border," *ḥadd*, illuminates some of the many paradoxes contained within the concept of borders. *Lisān al-'Arab* defines *ḥadd*, plural *ḥudūd*, as "the division between two things, so that one may not mix with the other or overpower the other."[1] The primary function of *ḥadd* is separation, dividing entities in order to differentiate between them. *Ḥadd* demarcates a certain order that must be maintained by keeping things in their proper place. It also marks the edge of this order, as *ḥadd* is described as "the end of everything," a final frontier separating the inside from the unknown exterior. The plural form, *ḥudūd*, denotes not only borders but also punishment, the mechanism for enforcing the divisions created by *ḥadd*. The related word *taḥdīd*, which means to demarcate or limit something links an entity's borders to its definition; borders give form to objects. They are the means by which one defines, comprehends, and categorizes his or her surroundings. Yet the semantic field of *ḥadd*

[1] Muhammad Ibn Manzur, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1988), 79.

also acknowledges the violence in the act of delineation that creates borders and meaning, as *ḥadd* can refer to the blade of a knife (*ḥadd al-sakīn*), and its adjectival form (*ḥādd*) carries the meaning "sharp." The metaphor of the knife blade reminds us that the border is a form of rupture or fracture, a wounding device that causes pain by forcibly slicing through the landscape upon which it is imposed. Borders can thus be abstract definitions or tangible blades, and they are double-edged swords, both necessary and painful.

I emphasize borders as a form of violent rupture in the etymology of *ḥadd* in order to call attention to the process of their creation. Inge Boer notes that the constructedness of boundaries – the fact that they are artificial, imposed, and reflective of political power – is often forgotten, effaced, or sanitized. Borders tend to naturalize themselves, she argues, and an integral part of the process of border construction is to obscure or forget that the border was in fact constructed. Through this "naturalizing impulse," borders come to appear as permanent, unquestioned, unremarkable, and even invisible entities.[2] Calling attention to the border's construction as a space and a concept, then, is a way of avoiding this pitfall by denaturalizing and demystifying the border.

In this dissertation, I examine works of Palestinian literature, film, and art that contest the naturalization and effacement of borders in Palestine and Israel. I show that in the past two decades, a new form of Palestinian cultural production has emerged that is characterized by an intensifying engagement with borders, a repetitive, intense focus on these spaces that I term "bordering." This dynamic of bordering has created what I call a

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[2] Inge E. Boer, *Uncertain Territories: Boundaries in Cultural Analysis*, ed. Mieke Bal, Bregje Van Eekelen, and Patricia Spyer (New York: Editions Rodopi BV, 2006), 6.

border aesthetic, and I argue that this aesthetic works against the naturalizing impulse of borders by staging the border's fractures within narratives, languages, and spaces. It produces a set of literary and visual texts that are out of control, parodic, multilingual, broken, incomprehensible, disjointed, and even silent. The spatial, textual, and linguistic disruptions in these works draw our attention to borders, reminding us constantly and repeatedly of their presence. I use theories of space, mobility, and transgression to conceptualize bordering as a means of both staging and contesting the violent ruptures constituted at and by borders. I show that the border aesthetic emerges from a particular historical and cultural moment in the 1980s and 1990s in which a Palestinian political and aesthetic order organized around the concept of resistance began to fray. This consensus gave way to what Jacques Rancière calls a "dissensus," a gap or rupture in a political or representational order.[3] Dissensus, Rancière argues, manifests itself by demonstrating a gap in the "sensible," or the accepted order of society and space.[4] It is within this gap that "aesthetic art" intervenes to refigure and reimagine this spatial and social order. Ranciere thus imagines a form of aesthetic intervention that both emerges from and engenders disruption. The "border" and the "aesthetic" in the term "border aesthetic" are bound together, then, as sites of rupture.

Bordering infuses works of literature by Raba'i al-Madhoun and Sayed Kashua, in which borders disrupt the foundations of the texts themselves and unsettle categories of narrative, author, and character, and dichotomies of inside and outside. It pushes the

[3] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 37.
[4] Ibid., 37–38. Rancière calls this order the "distribution of the sensible."

literary text to its limits. It also takes the form of non-textual mediums as seen in the films of Elia Suleiman and works of art by Emily Jacir, Yazid Anani, and Inass Yassin. These works use visual, aural, and spatial possibilities opened up by the mediums of cinema and art to unsettle borders, to reveal their constructedness and instability and to explore the possibility of alternatives to the proliferation of border spaces. Bordering is a move from the consensus of resistance to the dissensus of borders. It stages a shift from an ideological mode of representation, in which art functions in support of politics, to a performative mode, in which political critique (of borders) is embedded in and performed in myriad ways by the text itself.

While literature alone provides countless instances of bordering, the dissensus of the border aesthetic reverberates through multiple forms and mediums. I therefore choose to engage with a wide range of media, texts, and genres to theorize different facets of the border aesthetic; I use literary texts written in both Arabic and Hebrew, in addition to film and art. This interdisciplinary focus emerges, by necessity, out of the very types of ruptures I place at the center of this project, for the works of this border aesthetic reveal the inability of a single medium or language to represent fully the bordering of cultural production in Israel and Palestine. As I will show, single narratives split into multiple competing texts, monolingual texts are interrupted by other languages, and spoken and written languages are supplanted by visual communication. The disruption and dissensus of the border aesthetic function both within and between texts, a point I will explore further in the course of this introduction. First, however, I begin by exploring how the border came to occupy a central position in Palestinian politics, culture, and art.

A PLACE OF BORDERS

The bordering of cultural production in Israel and Palestine emerges from within a changing landscape of borders in the region. Though one can go back much further, the most relevant starting point for understanding the shifts in the region's borders is establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the ensuing Arab-Israeli war, known in Arabic as the *Nakba* ("the disaster") and in Israel as the War of Independence. By the end of the war, Israel controlled all of historic Palestine except the West Bank, which came under Jordanian control, and the Gaza Strip, which Egypt occupied. Hundreds of thousands[5] of Palestinians whose homes were located in the new Jewish state fled or were expelled to neighboring countries, becoming refugees with some living in camps in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, the West Bank, and Gaza, many of which still exist today. Those Palestinians who stayed behind became Israeli citizens but were placed under a system of military rule that lasted until 1966.[6] The armistice agreement that ended the war established the "green line," which separated Israel from the West Bank and Gaza and ran through the center of Jerusalem, which was divided between Israeli and Jordanian control.

In the Six-Day War of 1967, known in Arabic as the *Naksa* ("the setback"), Israel conquered the West Bank and Gaza, as well as Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Syria's Golan

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[5] Estimates vary widely, ranging from around 520,000 according to Israeli figures, to more than 900,000. The question of who bears responsibility for the refugee crisis is subject to fierce debate. See Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem: 1947 - 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 297.

[6] Ilan Pappé, *The Forgotten Palestinians: a History of the Palestinians in Israel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 46.

Heights. While this had the effect of reuniting previously divided areas,[7] it also created a system of military occupation and rule that has persisted in various forms to the present. Israel annexed large parts of Palestinian East Jerusalem, but its citizens refused Israeli citizenship, leaving the city's cultural and spatial fault lines largely in place despite official rhetoric of a "reunified" Jerusalem. By the 1980s, a previously limited Israeli effort to settle parts of the West Bank and Gaza expanded exponentially, which has led to the appropriation of large swaths of Palestinian land. The military administration of the Palestinian territories also began imposing an increasingly restrictive system of permits that regulated Palestinian freedom of movement, which were further tightened in response to the first Palestinian Intifada, or uprising, that broke out in 1987.[8] Military checkpoints became a much more common means of regulating and enforcing restrictions on Palestinian movement.

The signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993 marked yet another evolution in the system of borders that crisscross the area. This imposition of new borders produced a catalyst for the intensifying Palestinian interest in borders that is the focus of this project. These agreements are based on a series of zones or areas that partition the Palestinian territories

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[7] Ghassan Kanafani dramatizes this in his 1970 novel *'Ā'id Ilá Ḥayfā [Returning to Haifa]* (Beirut: Dār al-'Awda, 1970).

[8] B'Tselem chronicles the history of this permit regime, noting that between 1972 and 1989, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were by default permitted to travel to Israel except between the hours of 1 and 5 am. In 1989 in response to the Palestinian Intifada, this general exit order was revoked, and individual permits were required. While at first these permits were issued rather freely, they have become increasingly hard to come by in the past decade or so. "Closure," *B'Tselem*, January 1, 2013, http://www.btselem.org/freedom_of_movement/closure.

into different levels of Palestinian, Israeli, and joint control.[9] The agreement also established a Palestinian government, the Palestinian Authority, to administer the Palestinian areas. These agreements, in dividing the Palestinian territories, are predicated on a new exceedingly complex system of partitioned space and power. Eyal Weizman terms this a system of "split sovereignty,"[10] in which authority is fragmented and distributed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in a manner that effaces and obscures the exercise of power.

This agreement was intended as an interim solution while a final status agreement was reached, but this accord never came, and Oslo has remained in place for nearly 20 years. The post-Oslo peace process, which to this day continues to revive itself[11] in the face of repeated failure, reflects a conviction that drawing the "right" borders can solve this conflict. However, in the meantime the evolution of the system of borders established by Oslo has further tightened the vise of spatial restrictions. Following the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada in 2000, the new administrative borders established by Oslo became the basis for increased spatial restrictions on Palestinian movement. Israel tightened its restrictions on the West Bank and Gaza, limiting most Palestinians to PA controlled areas. This often meant the inability to leave one's own city or enter Israel or other parts of the Palestinian territories. Most work permits to Israel, where many Palestinians made a living, were revoked, and many more checkpoints appeared.

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[9] See Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (New York: Verso, 2007).
[10] Ibid., 144.
[11] The most recent resurrection of a process that is frequently declared dead occurred in July 2013, as US Secretary of State John Kerry convinced the two reluctant sides to return to the negotiating table. Stacie Goddard, "Put Middle East Peace to a Vote," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2013, sec. Opinion / Global Opinion, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/03/opinion/global/put-middle-east-peace-to-a-vote.html.

In the decade since, the temporary, ad hoc system of restrictions has become more and more elaborate, as temporary roadblocks transformed into extensive "terminals" controlling entrance and exit into Palestinian areas. This expansive system of roadblocks, military checkpoints, and walls constricts Palestinian movement within and between these territories. As a result, the checkpoints and walls that enforce this closure have created many new border zones that have become centers of Palestinian social, political, and economic life in the West Bank and Gaza. Markets pop up to serve lines of people waiting at a checkpoint or border crossing, people meet friends and lovers at the checkpoint, and walls function as sites of political protest.[12] This system of borders has affected nearly every aspect of life in the region, including culture.

An analogous growing cultural interest in borders has accompanied the rapid expansion of borders in the region, and they have asserted their presence in Palestinian literature, film, and art. A strain of interest in borders has existed among certain writers and filmmakers for decades. Some of the writings of Ghassan Kanafani, for instance, grapple with the dire consequences of closed borders or the unsettling possibilities of newly opened borders in the 1960s. And while Emile Habibi's iconic novel *The Pessoptimist* (1974) depicts the bewildering and absurd experience of encountering and trying to make sense of new and constantly changing boundaries, Michel Khleifi's film *Wedding in Galilee* (1987) explores the impact of Israeli restrictions on movement on

[12] See Weizman, *Hollow Land*, and Helga Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia Checkpoint: The Historical Geography of a Non-Place," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 42 (Summer 2010): 26–48.

Palestinian social rituals and gender relations.[13] In general, however, until the 1990s, writers and filmmakers were more focused on ridding themselves of these borders than grappling with their multiplying and intensifying presence.

The bordering of cultural production since the 1990s extends across generations, regions, languages, and mediums. In the works of long-established authors, like Sahar Khalifeh and Mourid Barghouti, borders have shifted from tangential elements of narrative to constitutive of the Palestinian experience.[14] Meanwhile, a younger generation of authors such as Adania Shibli, Ala Hlehel, and Sayed Kashua, has exposed and explored the pervasive presence of borders in all aspects of Palestinian life as they invade both public and private spaces. At the same time, Palestinian film has developed a border-inflected visual language, as seen in the stark, often documentary-esque cinematography of Rashid Masharawi in *Curfew* (1993) and the alternation between monotonous repetition and absurd fantasy in Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* (2002). Artists such as Emily Jacir have begun to use the physical spaces of new borders such as the checkpoints and the West Bank barrier as a canvas and a setting for visual critiques of the effects of borders, in effect appropriating border spaces to subvert the rationale for their existence. The intensive engagement with borders is constitutive of many of these works, providing their *raison d'être*. They represent a body of work that emerges from

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[13] See Kanafani, *'Ā'id ilá Ḥayfā [Returning to Haifa]*, *Mā Tabaqqá Lakum [All That's Left to You]* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'a, 1966), and *Rijāl fī al-Shams [Men in the Sun]* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'a, 1963).

[14] For example, see the shift in Khalifeh's work from *al-Ṣabbār [Wild Thorns]* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1976), in which the border is an incidental metaphor for Israeli cruelty, to *al-Mīrāth [The Inheritance]* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1997), which places boundaries at the center of the narrative. Or observe the creeping intensification of border restrictions between Barghouti's first memoir, *Ra'aytu Rām Allāh [I Saw Ramallah]* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1997) and his follow up, *Wulidtu Hunāk, Wulidtu Hunā [I Was Born There, I Was Born Here]* (Beirut: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 2009).

the fractures of the region's myriad divisions to engage critically with the borders that produce it.

The prevalence of borders has not gone unnoticed by scholars writing about Palestine and Israel, a number of whom have incorporated questions of borders into their scholarship. Carol Bardenstein and Barbara Parmenter both engage borders in their analyses of Palestinian memory, home, and exile.[15] Lila Abu-Lughod writes of the experiences of exile and return wrought by imposed boundaries and the forms of memory they produce.[16] Anna Ball and Refqa Abu-Remaileh engage with boundaries in Palestinian literature and film as microcosms of the larger processes of gender and occupation.[17] Karen Grumberg considers boundaries on both spatial and conceptual levels in her work on representations of quotidian spaces in Hebrew literature by both Israelis and Palestinians.[18] Gil Hochberg explores conceptual and intellectual divides in *In Spite of Partition*, which examines writers across the Middle East who challenge the reflexive separation of Arab and Jew and offer an alternative to partition.[19] These works use borders to elucidate a larger concern such as gender, exile, space, or of a regional

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[15] See Barbara M Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature*, 1st ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), and Carol Bardenstein, "Trees, Forests, and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999).

[16] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Return to Half-Ruins: Fathers and Daughters, Memory and History in Palestine," in *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 124–136.

[17] See Anna Ball, *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2012), and Refqa Abu-Remaileh, ""Palestinian Anti-narratives in the Films of Elia Suleiman," *Arab Media and Society* 5 (2008): 1–29.

[18] Karen Grumberg, *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011).

[19] Gil Z. Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

dynamic at work. Eyal Weizman provides an insightful and systematic analysis of different types of boundaries in Israel and Palestine, but from an architectural perspective.[20] By placing borders at the center of my analysis, I seek to bridge this gap, to show how literature, film, and art turn a sustained, intensified focus upon the border as an increasingly vital Palestinian cultural space.

DEFINING BORDERS

The focus on borders in contemporary Palestinian cultural production necessitates an examination of both the violence and the productive potential with which bordering imbues literature, film, and art. In this section I engage the problematic of borders through a theoretical analysis of their relationship to space, mobility, fragmentation, and transgression. The examination of borders on an aesthetic level runs the risk of effacing the very real, material effects of the occupation that these borders embody. Yet by highlighting the means by which aesthetic art fixes its gaze on the border and forces attention upon this space and its effects, my analysis foregrounds the ways in which literature, film, and art portray this materiality. From the horror of life under blockade in Gaza, to rituals and encounters exposed to the world at the checkpoint, the works I analyze expose and contest the real and consequential effects of borders on everyday life. In this spirit, I begin my theoretical exploration of borders with the violent imposition of order and power that I identified in the etymology of *ḥadd* above.

[20] See Weizman, *Hollow Land*.

Ḥadd as the blade of a knife indicates a form of violence that is bound to borders, a notion that also emerges from Gloria Anzaldúa's description of the border as a wound that refuses to heal. The border is a constant tearing of flesh, not a singular split but an endless series of ruptures at which "the Third World grates against the first and bleeds."[21] This image exposes the violence of the border that is often unseen or forgotten as borders become naturalized and permanent by denaturalizing the border and highlighting the violent processes that create and sustain it. In deconstructing the perceived fixed nature of the border, Anzaldúa shows that border is not a stable entity but rather a site of constant destruction and re-formation. Anzaldúa also discerns a creative potential in this destruction, as she seeks to uncover the subversive potential of the meeting of cultures that occurs at the border: "And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture."[22] The violence and displacement of the marginalized borderlands gives birth to a distinct new culture, a "mestiza consciousness" that functions as an alternative to hegemonic cultural and social categories. This wound creates a new cultural framework in which lines of language,[23] gender, and culture are interrogated and deconstructed in a way that is subversive despite being the product the violent exercise of power. The border is born of violence, but paradoxically this destruction contains the seeds of a creative subversion.

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[21] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books (1999), 1987), 25.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Anzaldúa performs the linguistic aspect of this "mestiza consciousness" by interspersing English and Spanish phrases in her writing, creating an unusual form of written code switching.

This initial contradiction in the notion of a border leaves some unanswered questions, however. What types of violence occurs at the border and from whence? What modes of subversion are possible at the border? Another related paradox of the border, of authority versus transgression, can clarify this point. The description of *ḥadd* as a means of maintaining order reiterates the relationship of borders to authority, a notion central to much theoretical literature on the subject. The notion of fixed and enforced borders is bound to the projection of state power, and many other less concrete types of borders (cultural differences, linguistic boundaries, societal taboos) reflect cultural norms and practices that are constantly reinforced by society. Michel Foucault uses Jeremy Bentham's notion of the Panopticon as an endlessly adaptable model for the creation of an all-pervasive "disciplinary society" that is the raison d'être of the modern state.[24] Foucault identifies two types of authority, a "discipline-blockade" that is predicated on explicit force, partition, and exclusion and emerges as a result of a crisis, and a panoptic "discipline-mechanism" that is "lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion" that operates on an everyday basis. Moreover he suggests that the articulation of power operates on a continuum between these two extremes,[25] but both are implicated in the establishment and regulation of boundaries, whether inflexible blockades or a constantly evolving and pervasive set of limits.

While the border reflects the authority and power of the state, they also provide spaces and means for the articulation of challenges to this authority, and herein lies one

[24] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 209.
[25] Ibid.

of its many paradoxes. A number of theorists have looked to mobility and mobile beings as a means of challenging state power. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomadology offers perhaps the best-known example. The nomad resides in the "smooth" space of the desert, beyond the frontier and outside the "striated" space of civilization controlled by authorities, which allows him to move in a non-linear fashion ("rhizomatically") and mount occasional guerrilla-style raids against state power; the nomad is a figure of resistance who stages subversive acts from outside, unrestricted by hegemonic spatial practices.[26] In this formulation, a border separates interior from exterior, and segmented, controlled space from unrestricted free space, sedentary from nomad. The nomad lives beyond the control of the state, which allows him to violate the boundaries and restrictions that characterize and reflect this control.

This nomadic approach to challenging boundaries and the power they reflect has its limits, however. Tim Cresswell warns against a tendency to uncritically fetishize the nomad as a liberated figure, noting that this figure has typically been "a remarkably unsocial being – unmarked by the traces of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and geography" and "abstract, dehistoricized, and undifferentiated."[27] The emphasis on mobile beings as a type of subaltern figure that transgresses by virtue of movement can unintentionally recreate discourses of otherness. The nomad figure, he suggests, can function as a new manifestation of Orientalist discourses that romanticize and essentialize

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[26] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986), 44; 30.
[27] Timothy Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 53.

the non-European other.[28] Inge Boer likewise argues that idea of the boundless freedom of the nomad itself ignores the conditions that give rise to nomadism, which does not occur in a vacuum, but rather "the violence and movement of nomads are inspired by outside conditions that impose restrictions upon them."[29] Though the nomad may seem boundless, this state of apparent boundlessness is itself the consequence of other types of imposed restrictions that, like many borders, are self-effacing.[30] Borders and the power dynamics that create them are impossible to escape fully, and boundlessness is an unattainable ideal.

How, then, is it possible to go beyond passive acceptance of borders and contest them? Michel de Certeau identifies the concept of "practice" as a form of spatial subversion that makes this possible. Practice offers a means of challenging the utopic and rationalized order that authorities seek to impose onto spaces such as cities in order to stamp out "traditions" and other "pollutions" that threaten this order.[31] De Certeau explores the means by which those subject to regimes of discipline and power grapple with and contest the boundaries imposed upon them through what he calls "pedestrian speech acts."[32] People in their common, daily practices do not merely passively receive political rules, cultural products, and most critically, spaces, but rather use and reuse them for their own purposes, appropriating and subverting them in the process. People

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[28] Ibid., 54.
[29] Boer, *Uncertain Territories*, 33.
[30] Ibid., 4.
[31] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 94. For instance, official Israeli discourse labels checkpoints "terminals" or "crossings," and military rule in the West Bank occurs under the auspices of a "Civil Administration."
[32] Ibid., 98.

enunciate by walking through a city, in which they not only follow prescribed paths but invent and improvise new possibilities, thereby quietly challenging the imposed order.[33] The act of (re-)using a space is thereby imbued with a subversive quality. This is the recourse of subordinated groups, which find "innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other's game…that is, the space instituted by others," and which "since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations."[34] De Certeau suggests that, in fact, the dominance of this apparatus has not completely eradicated other "heterogeneous" practices, and that "beneath what one might call the 'monotheistic' privilege that panoptic apparatuses have won for themselves, a 'polytheism' of scattered practices survives, dominated but not erased by the triumphal success of one of their number."[35] The last phrase, "the triumphal success of one of their number" reminds us that dominant (monotheistic) modes of discipline trace their own origins to the same panoply of practices that they attempt to eradicate.

Cresswell makes an important elaboration of de Certeau's point by showing that not all movement is subversive. He distinguishes between resistance and transgression on the basis of intentionality; resistance describes "purposeful action" taken against an entity with the intention of changing it, while transgression emphasizes the results and reactions brought about by actions.[36] The root meaning of "transgression" is to cross over, to violate a limit. *Lisān al-'Arab* uses an Arabic word that can mean transgression, *al-*

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 18.
[35] Ibid., 48.
[36] Tim Cresswell, *In Place/out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 22–23.

ta'addī, to describe what borders seek to prevent, "so that one [thing] can not transgress upon the other." Transgression is a violation of the order created by *ḥadd*, the border. Foucault, in "A Preface to Transgression," posits a symbiotic and dynamic relationship between limits and their transgression, saying that neither can exist without the other and that they are in constant friction.[37] Borders, in which the limits they set come into frequent contestation with those whose daily practices rub against said limits, seem to be fertile ground for acts of transgression. They become a staging ground for a confrontation between the authority that creates borders and the acts of transgression that challenge them; they are fundamentally opposed and in contradiction, but each cannot exist without the other.

Transgression, though a helpful starting point for exploring the productive potential of border spaces, is only one mode of dealing with their imposition. The liminality of the border both creates and destabilizes this potential. Liminality, of course, has become a frequently used term in cultural studies, particularly in a postcolonial and globalizing moment. Through concepts like hybridity, scholars have sought to account for various forms of cultural mixing, migration, and hyphenated identities that complicate categories of national culture, language, and identity.[38] These lines of inquiry seek to go beyond these borders to find new commonalities and shared spaces. However, these uses tend to elide the original meaning of liminality, which Victor Turner defines as the middle stage (marginal stage) of a rite of passage, in which one has exited the previous

[37] Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 34–35.
[38] See for instance Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

stage but not yet entered the next stage. It is a transitional state, and people in this state are "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."[39] As a transitional stage, liminality is inherently unstable, disruptive, and as the point between two stages it represents a form of rupture. Border spaces, as markers of liminality, can be seen as similarly disruptive, as can the acts of encountering, crossing, or inhabiting the border.

However, liminality does not entail the erasure of borders, and the temptation to elide borders risks perpetuating and reproducing them, as Inge Boer argues.[40] Boer proposes understanding borders as "arbitrary in character, temporary and changeable."[41] This formulation foregrounds the rupture created by borders through their imposition, which can easily become effaced by their naturalizing impulses. I read the ruptures produced by *ḥadd*, the border, as "arbitrary" and "changeable" in order to argue against the effacement and naturalization of borders in a way that preserves the possibility of challenging them. The disruptiveness of borders opens up new avenues of interpretation by creating processes of struggle, negotiation, and encounter.[42] As a site of rupture, boundaries produce new spaces, paradigms, and relationships between interior and exterior. Borders are at once destructive and creative, divisive and conjoining. De Certeau describes this "paradox of the frontier" in the following way: "Created by contacts, the points of differentiation between two bodies are also their common

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[39] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 94–95.
[40] Boer, *Uncertain Territories*, 4.
[41] Ibid., 10.
[42] Ibid., 9.

points."[43] He elaborates by saying that the in between space of the border is "a narrative sym-bol of exchanges and encounters." Borders are meeting points, where different spaces and people come into contact. Likewise a border that divides, whether a natural river or a man made wall, can also contain a crossing, or a bridge, that connects the two sides and subverts the division.[44] Borders, as "temporary and changeable" sites of encounter and crossing, themselves contain the seeds for subverting the divisions they create. In a contradictory yet productive fashion, the ruptures produced by the border's construction and existence also create the possibility of disrupting, collapsing, and fracturing the border itself, possibilities that echo through the literature, film, and art that are the subject of this dissertation. My analysis thus represents an attempt to expand that gap, to shed light upon the wounds of the border and expose the process of bordering that pervades the works in question.

The instability of the border does not negate the material experience of living under the shadow of imposed boundaries but rather shows this instability to be a constitutive element of the hardships it produces and a necessary first step to interrogating them. *Hollow Land*, Eyal Weizman's study of Israeli architectural practices in the Palestinian territories**,** excavates the extensive transformations produced by spatial practice and boundaries and, by interweaving the discursive and material effects of boundaries, reveals their interconnectedness. Grounding his analysis in architecture, Weizman uses built space to theorize boundaries in the region, and his reading of them as

[43] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 127.
[44] Ibid., 128.

an example of what he calls "elastic geography" places instability at the center of both the constitution of boundaries and the possibility of contesting them. He writes that

> the linear border, a cartographic imaginary inherited from the military and political spatiality of the nation state has splintered into a multitude of temporary, transportable, deployable and removable border synonyms – 'separation walls,' 'barriers,' 'blockades,' 'closures,' 'road blocks,' 'checkpoints,' 'sterile areas,' 'special security zones,' 'closed military areas', and 'killing zones' – that shrink and expand the territory at will. These borders are dynamic, constantly shifting, ebbing, and flowing; they creep along, stealthily surrounding Palestinian villages and roads…The anarchic geography of the frontier is an evolving image of transformation, which is remade and rearranged with every political development or decision.[45]

Weizman describes the system of borders and other spatial practices carried out by Israel in the Palestinian territories as constantly in flux, in a state of change, creation and destruction, expansion and contraction, a metastasizing web of ever evolving limits. It is not centrally controlled but "anarchic," and "diffused among a multiplicity" of actors.[46] Rather than fixed, as we might expect from physical borders, they are "constantly shifting." It is a set of borders of many types, from physical "separation walls" to rhetorical "special security zones," all subject to change at any moment. It calls for an expanded definition of borders, one that includes not only the most obvious forms of limits, but the political, bureaucratic, rhetorical, and cultural borders that also inflect the physical and social geography of the region.

[45] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 7.
[46] Ibid., 5.

Figure 1.1: Qalandia Checkpoint, a seemingly permanent border space that has nevertheless evolved and transformed in form and purpose many times in the past two decades. (Photo by author.)

If Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* traces the emergence of the panoptic apparatus and the borders it imposes in tandem with the modern, bureaucratic nation state, Weizman describes a moment of surpassing this paradigm, of a set of borders and systems of control that have fragmented and diffused among a multitude of forces that sometimes work in concert and sometimes press against one another. He does not describe the death knell of the nation state, nor the collapse of boundaries that is believed by some to accompany the post-national, globalizing present.[47] Rather it is a fragmentation of power and borders that because of its elasticity presents an even greater

[47] Arjun Appadurai, for instance, theorizes a series of global flows of people, culture, and goods emerging as an alternative to the nation state. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

challenge, for Weizman notes that "highly elastic political space is often more dangerous and deadly than a static, rigid one."[48] However, the flexibility and mobility of borders Weizman describes also provides many more points of inflection and pressure, and perhaps means of countering their imposition.[49] It opens up space for the types of contestation and encounter described above, not by erasing boundaries but by engaging with them and with the fragmentation and instability they produce.

In light of Anzaldúa's conceptualization of the border as violent yet productive, the type of flux Weizman describes, even if violent, can make room for forms of contestation or subversion. Like Anzaldúa's grating wound of the Third World scraping against the First on the U.S.-Mexican border, the constantly re-formed and redirected system of walls, tunnels, settlements, and checkpoints inevitably sprouts leaks and holes. In fact, Weizman concludes his work with just such an example, the maze of tunnels built between the Gaza Strip and Egypt to circumvent the Israeli blockade, and he describes a cat and mouse game that plays out between ever more sophisticated tunnel building techniques and evolving Israeli (and Egyptian) efforts to thwart them.[50] He notes that in their success, the tunnel diggers who circumvent the blockade also create a new border. Between the Israeli controlled airspace of drones and surveillance above, and the

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[48] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 7.

[49] The wall, for example, has proven a repeated flash point, creating new spaces and cultures of protest as it has been constructed. See the documentary by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi, *5 Broken Cameras* (Kino Lorber, 2013).

[50] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 257. For a light-hearted example of smuggling, see the case of Kentucky Fried Chicken delivered by tunnel: Fares Akram, "Tunneling KFC to Gazans Craving the World Outside," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2013, sec. World / Middle East, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/16/world/middleeast/tunneling-kfc-to-gazans-craving-the-world-outside.html.

tunnelers' underground dominion below, the space in between – the surface – becomes a border, a battle zone between air and tunnel.[51]

The myriad disruptions created by borders, then, can inspire new modes of engagement, allowing us to look for the gaps, shifts, and contradictions in this disciplinary space. We can approach them as three-dimensional spaces that are experienced and inhabited in a variety of ways. In this way we can go beyond abstracted nomads crossing lines, and the binaries produced by emphasizing the dichotomies of inside/outside, restrained/free, sedentary/nomad and focus instead on the paradoxes of the border – a space that divides and binds, that is marginal but nevertheless central, that signifies separation but also mixture, that is linear and solid yet constantly in flux and elastic. Placing boundaries at the center affirms their role not only as reflections of political, spatial, and social processes and categories but also as entities that define them. Or, as Lynda Nead argues, "meaning is organized and regulated at the edges or boundaries of categories."[52] An engagement with borders, then, can also reverberate far beyond the spaces themselves and allows us to shine a critical lens on the works of literature, film, and art they produce.

BEYOND RESISTANCE AND COMMITMENT

A focus on borders represents a shift from the interpretive lens of political engagement through which Palestinian literature, film, and art has traditionally been read, in which the

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[51] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 258.

[52] Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 33. Quoted in Boer, *Uncertain Territories*, 9.

relationship of works to the Palestinian cause, the *Nakba*, or any other aspect of the all-consuming Palestinian-Israeli conflict was central to much analysis. In *Resistance Literature,* Barbara Harlow uses Palestinian literature to theorize "resistance literature," a particular form of literary production linked to anti-colonial and national liberation movements, drawing heavily on the concepts articulated by Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani in his study of the literature of resistance (*adab al-muqāwama*) in Palestine.[53] Literature, according to Kanafani, itself has become an "arena of struggle" for liberation, and Harlow uses this framework to explore literatures of anti-colonial and post-colonial resistance movements across the "third world."[54]

Resistance literature in Palestine itself emerged in response to a larger movement in the Arab world toward commitment literature (al-*adab al-multazim*), which dominated Arab literary production in the second half of the twentieth century and was itself based in large part on Jean-Paul Satre's notion of *littérature engagée.*[55] The precise meaning of the term "commitment" (*iltizām*) was hotly debated and changed over time, but after 1967 it increasingly came to signify a strident anti-Israel tone as a means of expressing devotion to the Palestinian cause, as Ken Seigneurie writes.[56] Verena Klemm argues that commitment has been vacated of its meaning and has become a "hollow word," yet one

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[53] Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (London: Methuen, 1987), 2.
[54] Ibid., 2–6. The scare quotes around "third world" reflect Harlow's skepticism towards the third world as a concept and a category.
[55] Verena Klemm, "Different Notions of Commitment (*Iltizam*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq," *Arabic & Middle Eastern Literature* 3, no. 1 (2000): 51.
[56] Ken Seigneurie, *Standing by the Ruins: Elegiac Humanism in Wartime and Postwar Lebanon* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 5–6.

that is still bandied about from time to time.[57] After the defeat of 1967, in particular, commitment as a concept transformed from a signifier of leftist politics to a means of justifying authoritarianism and sectarianism, not *iltizām* but *ilzām* (compulsion).[58] As a result, many members of younger generations of Arab authors have come to view *iltizām* as an irrelevant and outdated concept, one that provokes scorn and skepticism. It is associated with a previous generation's failed project of Arab modernity that ended in defeat and authoritarianism.[59]

Palestinian resistance literature became a model to be emulated by all Arab writers in light of the decline of commitment literature after 1967, as Ghassan Kanafani argued in his writings on the Arab "poets of resistance" in Israel.[60] However, resistance literature, like commitment literature, arose from a particular moment in Palestinian (and world) history, one whose time has largely passed. Harlow notes the passing of the resistance moment in an interview in which she states that

> Resistance literature was written in the context of organized resistance movements and national liberation struggles. There are no more national liberation struggles. There are no more organized resistance movements. *There is no more resistance literature.* There are other kinds of literature, just as there are other kinds of struggles. But that one is over, as a literature it is closed.[61]

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[57] Klemm, "Different Notions of Commitment (*Iltizam*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq," 57. Quoted in Seigneurie, *Standing by the Ruins*, 7.
[58] Seigneurie, *Standing by the Ruins*, 6.
[59] Tarek El-Ariss, "Fiction of Scandal," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43, no. 2–3 (January 1, 2012): 521.
[60] Klemm, "Different Notions of Commitment (*Iltizam*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq," 58.
[61] Barbara Harlow, "On Literature and Resistance." Interview by Betsy Esch and Nancy Coffin, 1998, http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/1835. Emphasis mine.

One can debate how resistance literature met its end in Palestine, but somewhere between the PLO's loss of its Beirut headquarters in 1982 and all of the cultural production that it supported, the first Intifada in 1987, and the signing of the Oslo Accords, the notion of armed struggle and a literary movement that works in support of the resistance effort became a relic of the past. The PLO, in distant yet comfortable exile in Tunis, lost its status as primary catalyst for resistance efforts, particularly following the grassroots Palestinian Intifada and then the establishment of the Palestinian Authority after Oslo. Harlow describes the literary production of the post-*iltizām*, post-resistance moment as a literature of "alienation" (*al-ightirāb*), a rejection of the faith in the political power of art that resistance and commitment literature presume.[62] In an age in which the PLO has replaced its resistance activities with the act of governing through the Palestinian Authority, a faint facsimile of authoritarian Arab regimes, and the peace process has wrought frustration after frustration and an ever tightening spatial and political vise on Palestinian life, formulaic evocations of commitment and resistance can often ring hollow.

TOWARD A BORDER AESTHETIC

If the heyday political commitment of the 1960s and 1970s inspired a literature of resistance, I show that the post-Oslo period has produced an aesthetic that emerges from the process of bordering in literature, film, and art described above. The border aesthetic describes an unsettling of language and space caused by the encounter with borders that

[62] Harlow, *Resistance Literature*, 164.

can be discerned by examining processes of intensification, disruption, contestation, and crossing in literature, film, and art. This border aesthetic represents a break from the political consensus that produced resistance literature in Palestine, as well as a departure from the post-colonial tendency to seek out a liberating form of hybridity. Works of the border aesthetic, I argue, stage the disruption of borders through unorthodox uses of language, narrative, and space that emerge from the gaps and fractures of the border. They disrupt the spatial order that created them. The works of the border aesthetic, like Rancière's aesthetic art, disrupt the order of imposed and constructed boundaries, but they do not seek to replace it with an alternative single meaning or order. The border aesthetic instead revels in the paradoxes and dissensus created by fragmentation and rupture at the border, makes them visible, and makes possible a politics of boundaries. In this way, the rupture that I read in Ibn Manzur's definition of *ḥadd* returns to the border itself to interrogate and disrupt the ways in which it is constructed and represented.

The works that I consider seek to escape the confines of highly circumscribed spatial and discursive borders, and here is where the major shift from other modes of Palestinian cultural production lies. They seek not to position themselves within a particular discourse such as resistance, but rather to probe the limits of such discourses. Instead of reproducing traditional narrative tropes, they interrogate their contemporary relevance. Rather than promoting a particular national ideology, they grapple for new transnational frames of reference, and pushing the limits of language, they search for new languages and codes to represent that which resists representation. The question of

whether such tasks are, in fact, possible, and to what effect, lies at the center of the remainder of this dissertation, which is divided as follows.

The journey of the border aesthetic begins with the breakdown of a narrative. Chapter 2 centers on *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, a novel by Palestinian-British author Raba'i al-Madhoun that tells the story of a Palestinian exile who returns to Gaza after a long absence and meets an Israeli woman along the way. The novel portrays a series of border crossings that disrupt his journey and, by doing so, parodies a common Palestinian literary trope, the narrative of return. I argue that the novel uses metafiction and parody to fracture the cohesiveness of the narrative, producing instead a series of conflicting narratives that displace the author as an authoritative figure. Repeated encounters with borders, culminating with the random violence and bombs of a blockaded Gaza, create a stray, "delinquent" narrative that careens out of control. This stray narrative heralds the demise of the trope of the exiled author's return to Palestine as a key to deciphering the condition of Palestine today.

In chapter 3, I move from narrative to language itself, as I turn to the Hebrew works of Sayed Kashua, a Palestinian citizen of Israel. In this chapter I explore the representation of border crossing in Kashua's novels, particularly his first, *Dancing Arabs*, and his most recent, *Second Person Singular*. I demonstrate that Kashua's works stage a move to a post-resistance moment in Palestinian literature that is formed at and through borders. I argue that this moment is constituted through a dynamic of estrangement created by the repeated, compulsive act of crossing borders. Borders, which takes forms such as checkpoints and divided cities, produce "transfers" or "switches" in

Kashua's characters, particularly through language. However, their acts of crossing produce gaps, dissonances, disruptions, and silences that engender increasingly inescapable forms of estrangement. The result is a form of exile at the border, of compulsively crossing and inhabiting borders, that paradoxically emerges not from a position of exteriority, like al-Madhoun's returning exile, but from the "inside," the Palestinians who remained in Israel after 1948.

Chapter 4 turns to the realm of cinema with an analysis of the film *Divine Intervention*, directed by Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman. A largely silent film set primarily in Nazareth, Jerusalem, and at an Israeli military checkpoint, *Divine Intervention* has often been described as offering an "absurd" take on life as a Palestinian in Israel, and on Suleiman's incorporation of a diverse amalgam of cinematic styles and genres. In this chapter, however, I focus on the film's checkpoint scenes to show that the film's depiction of the roadblock is highly unstable and reflexive, both of which call attention to the ways in which this space's representation on screen is constructed. I argue, in turn, that *Divine Intervention* uses these tools to reveal the fragility of the checkpoint space itself. The camera creates the possibility of interrogating its imposition.

Chapter 5 journeys from the celluloid space of the film to the streets and squares of occupied Ramallah, as I turn to a group of Palestinian artists who use the public spaces of the defacto Palestinian capital to stage artistic interventions. I begin with a discussion of the main site of these interventions, al-Manara Square, as a type of border space implicated in the exercise of authority in Ramallah. In recent years, this authority has sought to regulate and order the city in order to encourage globalization and foreign

investment in Ramallah. However, I show that this form of development relies on the imposition of a series of borders and blank spots that produce amnesia and blindness. I argue that public interventions in Ramallah have sought to expose and reuse these blank spots to articulate visions of a historically conscious but present-focused urban space in Ramallah, one that does not seek to return to earlier notions of resistance but at the same time avoids the amnesia of unbridled globalized development. However, this attempt finds its limits in the necessity of situating the critique of the border within the very space it contests.

I conclude in Chapter 6 by considering both the limits and possibilities raised by my analysis of borders in Palestinian literature, film, and art. I show that the border not only pervades these works but binds them all together across language, genre, and form. The border is inescapable, at once the cause of the fragmentation of the works I analyze and the means by which they go beyond these fractures to produce new genres and aesthetics. The border provides a code for reading these works. Finally, I consider the possibility of reading borders in Palestine as a test case, one whose relevance is not limited to this specific context but rather can resonate much further.

This conclusion – the place where the journey through the borders of Palestine and Israel comes to an end – brings us back to where we began, at the contradictions of the border. The border produces incomprehensibility but provides the code for deciphering its incoherence. It is both the cause and the effect of fragmentation, thereby creating a highly circumscribed space that reverberates through many other spaces, and it is both fragmenting and fragmented. The contradictory character of the subject of this

dissertation warrants one final point: I do not assign myself the impossible task of deciphering, unraveling, or in any other way "solving" these contradictions in the preceding introduction or the following pages. Instead, I search for the range of possibilities opened up by such contradictions that allow the works I examine to turn their eye on the border, to dig through the façade of impenetrability it accrues for itself to reveal the fractures that lie beneath it.

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Chapter 2

"A House with Two Shadows:" Parodic Narratives of Return in Raba'i al-Madhoun's *The Lady from Tel Aviv*

A novel-within-a-novel entitled *A House with Two Shadows* (*Ẓillān li-Bayt Wāḥid*) haunts Raba'i al-Madhoun's semiautobiographical narrative of return to Palestine, *The Lady from Tel Aviv* (*al-Sayyida min Tall Abīb*, 2009). Walid Dahman, the main character of al-Madhoun's novel and the author of *A House with Two Shadows*, explains that the name of his novel refers to two people – Palestinian and Israeli – sharing one land, but this is merely one of the title's many layers of meaning. A shadow, as Walid notes, cannot exist by itself, as "it is not born except in the light, and does not die except in the darkness."[1] It is an inherently unstable and fragile entity, one that constantly changes position and can disappear at any time with the passage of a cloud or a sunset. It is also a reflection, a representation of some other entity. The image of *two* shadows emanating from a single object suggests a division, a border, and a split representation of its source,

[1] Raba'i Al-Madhoun, *Al-Sayyida min Tall Abīb [The Lady from Tel Aviv]* (Beirut: al-Mu'asasa al-'Arabiya lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 2009), 107.

but one that is unstable and can collapse at any time. How do these two shadows, singular in origin but born of a rupture that splits them, relate to each other and to the unstable boundary that separates them? To put it another way, how does one perceive and represent a reality that is fractured, multiple, and ever changing?

The Lady from Tel Aviv poses these questions by casting a series of intertwining, splitting, and merging shadows to tell the story of a Palestinian's return from exile. The novel ostensibly follows the journey of Walid Dahman, a British-Palestinian journalist and writer originally from Gaza, who returns to visit his home and family in 2005 for the first time since his exile following the Six-Day War of 1967. On his journey from London to Tel Aviv, Walid meets Dana, an Israeli woman who captivates him, and the two form a quick bond. Once they part ways upon arrival in Tel Aviv, the novel continues to follow each character's journey by alternating between Dana's return to Tel Aviv and Walid's homecoming in Gaza. This narrative split adds an additional (Israeli) voice to Walid's previously monovocal narrative of return. Added to this complex structure is a *mise en abîme* in the form of Walid's own novel, *A House with Two Shadows*, which tells the story of a Palestinian-German man named Adel who also returns to Gaza for the first time and meets an Israeli woman along the way. As the novel progresses, the stories of Walid and Adel merge; in Gaza, Walid meets the "real" Adel, who seeks to reconnect with an old lover named Layla, who herself is a distant relative of Walid. Walid becomes intricately involved in this saga during his time in Gaza, and distinguishing between Walid's experiences and those of the real and fictional Adels becomes increasingly difficult. Meanwhile, the novel continues to follow Dana's return

to Tel Aviv and her attempts to negotiate the status of her relationship with a long-time Israeli boyfriend, as well as a scandalous secret affair that has entangled her with the son of an unnamed Arab head of state. In the end, Walid returns to London, and he and Dana plan to meet but the rendezvous never takes place.

Al-Madhoun's novel is an example of contemporary Palestinian literary attempts to subvert common tropes, such as the Palestinian narrative of return, in order to engage with and challenge the proliferation and increasing fragmentation of Palestinian physical and cultural space. *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, a 2010 finalist for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, with an English translation by Elliot Colla released in July 2013, is the debut novel for al-Madhoun, also a journalist who writes for *al-Sharq al-Awsat* newspaper in London. Al-Madhoun draws heavily on his own life in his portrayal of Walid Dahman, the novel's protagonist. Like Walid, al-Madhoun is a Palestinian writer who has lived in exile since the Israeli occupation of Gaza in 1967. Following his forced exile, al-Madhoun played an active role in the Palestinian resistance in the 1970s until deciding to devote his full attention to writing.[2] His work has been compared to novels by Emile Habibi, Elias Khoury, and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, a lineage that makes its presence known through the novel's intricate structure.[3]

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which numerous shadows, boundaries, and encounters disrupt and redirect Walid's return journey. I argue that these myriad

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[2] See al-Madhoun's autobiography: Raba'i Al-Madhoun, *Ṭa'm al-Furāq [The Taste of Separation]* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabīyah lil-Dirāsātwa-al-Nashr, 2011).

[3] Atallah Muhajerani, "The Lady from Tel Aviv: A Triangle of Love, Life, and Death," *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London, December 3, 2009), http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=10992&article=546872#.UjeOYmSQccs.

disruptions unsettle the experience of return, and that *The Lady from Tel Aviv* reimagines the return narrative to produce a multivocal, metafictional novel that subverts and parodies the conventions of literary representations of return narrative. Border crossing create repeated disruptions, diversions, and detours of the return journey, spawning a series of split narratives and encounters that undermine the author's control of the novel. This produces an anarchic text that dethrones the writer from his position of privilege and heralds the demise of the return narrative as the domain of the exiled author. In its place, *The Lady from Tel Aviv* produces a stray narrative, an out of control text that emerges from the terror and chaos Walid encounters in Gaza to replace the lost voice of the author-exile. I begin my analysis of *The Lady from Tel Aviv* by exploring the Palestinian cultural and literary trope of return from exile, which provides the starting point to which *The Lady from Tel Aviv* repeatedly returns in order to deconstruct it.

RECONFIGURING THE RETURN NARRATIVE

Return is a well-established trope in Palestinian literature. This reflects the singular importance that return has occupied in Palestinian political and cultural discourse since the *Nakba*, "the disaster," the Arabic term for the defeat and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians as a result of the establishment of Israel in 1948. The desire to return to lost homes, villages, and homeland has been a constant and central Palestinian political and cultural imperative for the past 60 years. This desire is fantasmatically

enacted as a victorious return after a successful struggle to defeat Israel.[4] Return is the end point of what Rashid Khalidi describes as the decades-long, epic-like Palestinian narrative of struggle to reform itself after loss and expulsion.[5]

A fair bit of slippage appears in the development of the concept of return, which has undergone several significant shifts at the epistemological and political levels in the decades since 1948. Early articulations saw return as a "logical and natural outcome of the completion of 'liberation'"[6] and believed that the Palestinians' Arab allies would lead them to victory. However, the defeat of 1967 placed a military victory further away than ever, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) emerged as a powerful political force and began to take matters into its own hands. It trained and deployed "resistance fighters" to stage guerrilla operations against Israel from Jordan and later Lebanon. It also began to approach the "right of return" as an issue in its own right and began to draw heavily on the discourse of global human rights to articulate this claim. A change in preferred terminology for those who fled, from *lāji'ūn* (refugees) to *'ā'idūn* (returnees) in the 1970s reflects the emergence of return as a demand in its own right.[7] This articulation of a right of return, first enshrined in 1974, emerged at the beginning of a gradual shift in Palestinian strategy from armed struggle to negotiated settlement (the "two-state solution").[8] A further shift occurred in the 1990s with the signing of the Oslo Accords

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[4] Rashid Khalidi, "Observations on the Right of Return," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 2 (January 1992): 33–34.
[5] Ibid., 29.
[6] Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland*, 1st ed (New York: Routledge, 2003), 141.
[7] Ibid., 131.
[8] Khalidi, "Observations on the Right of Return," 34–35.

and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. In the on-again, off-again, currently stalled peace negotiations that have occurred in recent years, the Palestinian leadership has included the right of return as one of its demands for a final status settlement, albeit without defining the scope or meaning that return would take in a negotiated agreement. Yet many refugees have expressed a sense of betrayal as a result of the peace process because Palestinian leaders seemed willing to sign away or dilute the right of return.[9]

This fear of losing the right of return reflects a tension between political contingencies and popular imagination. For many Palestinian refugees, the desire to return more closely resembles a "collective wish passed on from one generation to the next" than a concrete political platform.[10] Though meanings and definitions have evolved with generational and political changes, the imperative to return has remained salient among many Palestinians in the diaspora even as it receives less attention from political leaders. Immediately following 1948, many expected a quick return to Palestine and sought to imitate pre-1948 society in exile.[11] When this did not occur, memory, both cultural and individual, became the primary vehicle through which the imperative to return remained relevant. As new generations appeared over the years, these memories became an inheritance by which knowledge of Palestine was preserved from afar.

Memory has played a particularly important role in this process of transmission, through which "Palestine was made tangible to an almost sensory level where children born in the diaspora could describe their family's house down to the texture of the bricks,

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[9] Schulz, *The Palestinian Diaspora*, 230.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Victoria Mason, "Children of the 'Idea of Palestine': Negotiating Identity, Belonging and Home in the Palestinian Diaspora," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2007): 273.

the position of an olive tree in the yard or the scent from a decades-old lemon tree."[12] In recent decades, such memories, typically preserved orally, have begun to appear in written form, providing a vehicle for the preservation of memories and the imperative to return, as the generation that fled has begun to die out. These so-called "village books" combine histories, stories, maps, documents, genealogies, and land records of destroyed villages and function as documentation of village histories and memories.[13] These memories and histories, both oral and written, articulate and preserve the desire to return to Palestine, prompting a new generation "to continue to fight and believe that [the lost village of] Sumahta and Palestine can be returned."[14] These village books demonstrate the means by which memory functions as a weapon to ensure continued fighting and resistance, preservation and the possibility of national repair and renewal through return. In this formulation, memories of pre-1948 Palestine represent not only the past but also a model for the future as well. Removed from the political considerations of how to accomplish this goal, return is imagined culturally as a fantasy of reclaiming of the past in the future in a way that makes Palestine whole again.

Significantly, most literary works that engage with the question of return avoid imagining this future return. Instead, they tend to portray experiences of return in the present (i.e. under Israeli rule), which are often temporary journeys and/or illicit infiltration. This type of return is, as Edward Said notes, a fraught act that merges the exile's ecstasy at returning to the land he remembers with the shock of finding that this

[12] Ibid.
[13] Rochelle Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 28–29.
[14] Ibid., 55.

place has acquired "a new name, people, and identity that deny Palestine altogether."[15] The present contrasts violently with both pre-exile memories and the type of return imagined in Palestinian culture. These moments of rupture reveal the experience of return under Israeli rule to be, according to Said, one that "reenacts exile rather than repatriation."[16] It serves, then, as a reminder of the original loss and its lack of resolution.

This mode of shocking return forms the core of Ghassan Kanafani's novel *Returning to Haifa* (*'Ā'id ilā Hayfā*, 1969), in which the main character Said and his wife Safiyya, who are refugees who fled Haifa in 1948, return to visit the home, city, and son they left behind. Upon arriving at their home and meeting their lost child – since adopted and raised as Israeli – the full extent of the loss of their home, nation, and son becomes starkly clear. Said's shock at seeing his home and family in the hands of his enemy becomes an impetus for renewed commitment to the imagined, future return articulated in Palestinian political and cultural discourse. Though previously ambivalent towards the resistance movement, as Said and Safiyya leave he tells the Israelis in his home that he will return victorious and declares his support for armed struggle.[17] The story's focus on the painful present and the tragic past highlights the incomplete state of the Palestinian struggle and thus calls for renewed commitment to doing so. This message befits Kanafani's status as both a prominent author and a political leader.[18] Kanafani's novel

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[15] Edward W. Said, "Foreward," in *I Saw Ramallah*, by Mourid Barghouti, trans. Ahdaf Soueif (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2000), viii.
[16] Ibid., xi.
[17] Kanafani, *'Ā'id ilá Ḥayfā [Returning to Haifa]*, 187.
[18] Kanafani was a leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Marxist Palestinian resistance group. His potent combination of political activism and literary fame made him a target, and he

appeared during a time when Palestinian political leaders were reassessing the means by which they fought Israel. Early reliance on Arab states gave way to independent Palestinian political and military organizations that assumed this mantle in the wake of the 1967 defeat. Kanafani's novel captures the renewed impetus for struggle that emerged from the "setback, and the potential of the act of return to serve as a catalyst for renewed political commitment."[19]

The rupture of return can serve not only as a call to arms, but also as a call for new approaches to the struggle, as Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* (*al-Ṣabbār*, 1976) shows.[20] This novel uses the shock of return to critique the gap between resistance movements outside of Palestine and conditions within the West Bank and Israel. Usama, an exile who returns to the West Bank to fight the occupation, finds himself dismayed by the reality of the occupation and lashes out, decrying the laziness and complacency of the Palestinians he meets. As in *Returning to Haifa*, the experience of return for Usama produces a confrontation, forcing him to grapple with the gap between his memories of Palestine and his present reality, between his idealized image of a society actively resisting the Israeli occupation and the complicit acquiescence he discovers upon his return, embodied by his cousin Adel. Both characters' stories end in disaster, a conclusion that serves as an indictment both of Usama's refusal to countenance reality and of Adel's complacency, and of the divisions that plague Palestinian society. Khalifeh's novel harnesses the return narrative to show the gap between the realities of

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was assassinated in 1972, likely by Israeli intelligence. See Barbara Harlow, "Return to Haifa: 'Opening the Borders' in Palestinian Literature," *Social Text* no. 13/14 (January 1, 1986): 9.

[19] Ibid., 5.

[20] Khalifeh, *Al-Ṣabbār*.

life under occupation and the idealism of those in exile, and to reveal the need for a critical reexamination of Palestinian strategies. Like Kanafani, the return journey serves as a tool and a catalyst for new political resolve, but in this case by means of critical self-examination.

More recent works that portray the experience of return tend to deemphasize questions of struggle, particularly after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, which transformed the PLO from the leadership of the resistance movement into the government of a Palestinian proto-state in the West Bank and Gaza. This political change opened the doors to more refugees who wished to return and produced a new wave of autobiographical return narratives. Poet Mourid Barghouti's memoir *I Saw Ramallah* (*Ra'aytu Rāmallah*, 1996) portrays a similar journey of return for Barghouti, who has lived in exile since 1967. Like the other works mentioned, he confronts the gap between his memories, his desires, and the reality he encounters and uses this to stage a critique of prevailing orthodoxies. In this case Barghouti's experience undermines the "victory" of the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority as he arrives at the border crossing into the West Bank that remains under Israeli control and waits to cross and return after 30 years of absence. This reality disturbs him, and instead of a triumphant return he finds himself unsettled by what he finds: "Do I really want boundaries for Palestine?... Now I want borders that later I will come to hate."[21] Crossing the border, for Barghouti crystallizes the failure of the peace process to reconcile the gap

[21] Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, trans. Ahdaf Soueif (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 38.

between reality and the desired experience of return. Yet while the border unsettles Barghouti, it remains only the first part of a journey that continues to Ramallah and the rest of the West Bank. In *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, by contrast, a series of borders engenders repeated disruptions and encounters that call into question the very possibility of the return narrative.

SHADOWS OF PARODY

In *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, the protagonist Walid declares:

> I found myself an author and a protagonist … tracing Adel's footsteps and searching – on behalf of him and myself – for Layla, in reality (*al-wāqi'*) and in the novel, in reality (*al-ḥaqīqa*) and in the shadow (*al-ẓill*).[22]

In this statement Walid establishes a series of binaries – "author" and "protagonist," "reality" and "novel," and "reality" and "shadow" – while also declaring his intention to subvert them. He places them in opposition to each other but also binds them together, inhabits, and engages both simultaneously. By juxtaposing "reality" (*al-ḥaqīqa*) and "shadow" (*al-ẓill*), Walid contests the link between the two. A shadow may but is not necessarily bound by reality, just as a protagonist is not bound by its author, and novel is not limited by the reality that produces it. The verb form of *ẓill*, *ẓalla*, means "to spend time doing [something]," with the caveat that it only refers to activities during daylight hours.[23] The noun, *ẓill*, then, denotes a shadow, a form of darkness that can only occur in the light. Its existence is contingent upon the presence of another object that creates it.

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[22] Al-Madhoun, *Al-Sayyida Min Tall Abīb [The Lady from Tel Aviv]*, 265.
[23] Muhammad Ibn Manzur, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, vol. 8 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1988), 259.

The shadow can thus only exist as a reflection, a darkened mirror image. Yet the original does not limit the shadow; the shadow can move, shift, change shape, and refract back onto its source. The shadow is a representation but one that does not remain faithful to its origin.

In a literary context the metaphor of the shadow – an imitation that goes beyond the original that produced it – denotes a contested relationship to representation. Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," also reformulated in Tawfiq al-Hakim's play *People of the Cave* (*Ahl al-Kaḥf*), relates the story of prisoners who can only see shadows of objects reflected off a wall. Unable to see the original, they mistake the representation, the shadow, for the object itself.[24] The shadow in the cave is a form of limitation, an error, but it also suggests a form of parody. Parody, according to Linda Hutcheon, is "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity."[25] Parody, specifically postmodern parody, draws from and appropriates earlier styles, genres, images, and tropes and reconfigures them. Critics like Frederic Jameson have dismissed postmodern parody as devoid of meaning, a neutral "pastiche" or "blank parody" that uncritically cannibalizes the past.[26] However, Hutcheon argues that postmodern parody invokes the past not nostalgically but in order to critique it and give it new meaning.[27] A parodic work of literature or art is one that is "both

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[24] Plato, *Plato: "The Republic"*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 220.
[25] Linda Hutcheon, "The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History," *Cultural Critique* no. 5 (December 1, 1986): 185.
[26] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 17.
[27] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 89.

deconstructively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation."[28] The reflexive appropriation and subversion of past tropes, thus, allows the creation of new, self-aware modes of representation.

Metafiction can be understood as a type of parody in which a work of literature comments on itself as a fictional narrative and thereby reminds readers of its fictional status. Patricia Waugh writes that metafiction "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."[29] It questions the sacrosanct divides that separate author from text and fiction from reality by shifting the reader's attention from the events of a novel to the act of narrating them, thereby "undermining the traditional coherence of the 'fiction' itself."[30] Metafiction has become more widespread in recent decades in Arabic literature, as seen in the works of Elias Khoury, Rabih Jaber, and others, a trend that has often been interpreted as a renewed interest in pre-modern narrative modes.[31] However, the significance of metafiction goes beyond a return to the "pre-modern." A move away from modernist realist techniques possesses an added layer of significance in Palestinian literature specifically because of historical and ideological connections between literary

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[28] Ibid., 94.

[29] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

[30] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981), 28.

[31] Elias Khoury, "Mawt al-Mu'allif [Death of the Author]," in *al-Dhākira al-Mafqūda: Dirāsāt Naqdīya* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Abḥāth al-'Arabīyah, 1982), 72–73. Also see Stefan G. Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 268.

realism and Palestinian literature of resistance.[32] This tendency reflects a common (but by no means universally held) belief that realism is the most effective means of contributing to the Palestinian political struggle through literature by serving as an artistic vehicle for the articulation of political arguments.[33]

Al-Madhoun's narrative(s) of return seek to reflexively comment upon and critique their own existence. This reflexivity appears in the other binaries that Walid's statement produces. He declares that he is at once author and protagonist, unsettling the boundaries between writer and character as he assumes the role of both in pursuit of his novel's character, Adel. His narrative merges with that of Adel, which subverts the other juxtaposition in this statement, the contrast between reality (*al-wāqi'*, literally "that which has befallen us") and the novel. Reality and the novel are neither entirely distinct entities nor identical. The novel is like the shadow; it is born of a particular reality but also transcends the conditions that produced it and reshapes our understanding of it. As I intend to show in the remainder of this chapter, *The Lady from Tel Aviv* is a novel that produces multiple novels, and a narrative of return that spawns multiple narratives. It calls into question the reality that gives birth to them, and sows the possibility of a new

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[32] Authors of Palestinian prose have been a bit slower to move away from realism than those in many other Arab countries, where the challenge to realist "commitment literature" is well documented. See for example, Issa J. Boullata, Kamal Abdel-Malek, and Wael B. Hallaq, *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature: Essays in Honor of Professor Issa J. Boullata* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). Of course this is not a uniform rule, and there are important counterexamples such as *The Pessoptimist* by Emile Habibi, which uses humor and fantasy to train a critical eye on the predicament of Palestinians who remained in Israel. Emile Habibi, *al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība fī Ikhtifā' Sa'īd Abī al-Naḥs al-Mutashā'il [The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist]*, Riwāyāt al-Hilāl (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1998).

[33] Ghassan Kanafani's own experiment with non-realist techniques in *All That's Left to You* provoked a significant amount of controversy for its stylistic innovations and a heated debate over its efficacy as a work of resistance literature. Aida Azouqa, "Ghassan Kanafani and William Faulkner: Kanafani's Achievement in 'All That's Left to You'," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 31, no. 2 (January 1, 2000): 147.

type of novel and a distinct mode of narrating the experiences of Palestine today. Through these shadows and multiplicities, the novel focuses intensively on the border by staging its rupturing effect through the text and its narratives, characters, and authors.

THE LADY FROM TEL AVIV: A NOVEL OF SHADOWS

The Lady from Tel Aviv identifies itself as a metafictional, parodic text, a shadow of the return narrative, with the appearance of its title page, which heralds the many narrative disruptions, detours, and splits to come in the novel. The title page appears not at the beginning of the text but on page 45. Prior to the title's appearance, the novel sets the stage for Walid's return. It begins with Walid's conversation with his mother in which he informs her he is coming to Gaza for the first time in 38 years and chronicles her preparations for his return amidst the Israeli settlements, checkpoints, and bombs that dominate life there. Then, as the moment of return approaches, the novel journeys into the past to the last time Walid was in Gaza, when he left to continue his studies in Cairo and never returned. It lays the groundwork for a familiar return narrative in which the exile must reconcile his memories with the reality of the present.

However, the appearance of the title page disrupts this narrative trajectory. Its appearance *after* the reader learns of Walid's return to Gaza and his memories of his pre-exile life leaves these elements outside of the principle narrative. They are background and function as a preface, informative but not crucial to the story. The confrontation between past and present that lies at the core of the works of Kanafani, Khalifeh, and Barghouti is relegated to the margins of al-Madhoun's novel. This oddly-placed title page

that marginalizes these elements of the return narrative positions *The Lady from Tel Aviv* as a novel that subverts the trope of return and flouts its conventions in order to imagine a new type of narrative experience. It forms a type of border, a signifier of the shift to a new set of narratives that emerge like shadows of the originary return narrative. It marks the appearance of these shadow narratives as a form of simulacrum, a distorted copy of an inaccessible original.[34] They signify not only a different type of return narrative but one that emerges in a context in which the original no longer functions as an available model for narrating the experience of return.

The novel's title as it appears here, *Al-Sayyida min Tall Abīb* (*The Lady from Tel Aviv*), marks it as a parodic narrative of return, one that emerges from the trope of return but, like the simulacrum, does not faithfully reproduce it. Like *Returning to Haifa* and *I Saw Ramallah*, this novel's title references a city, but while these other works articulate claims to these places as Palestinian cities that have been usurped by Israeli conquest and occupation, this title references Tel Aviv – the first "Jewish city" which came to signify quintessentially Israeli, Zionist space.[35] For Palestinians, the very existence of Tel Aviv serves as a constant reminder of defeat, and it is typically viewed as a space to be forgotten or erased rather than to be reclaimed.[36] Al-Madhoun's inclusion of "Tel Aviv" in the title thus distinguishes the novel both from those works that stage a return to the

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[34] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 6.

[35] Barbara E. Mann, *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), xi.

[36] Suad Amiry exemplifies this sentiment in her desire to forget the "Zionist capital Tel Aviv" in favor of Jaffa, her "Arab hometown" that has been swallowed up by Tel Aviv's expansive sprawl. Suad Amiry, *Nothing to Lose but Your Life: An 18-hour Journey with Murad* (Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Pub, 2010), 150.

lost home(town) as a site of return and reclaiming, and from the rhetoric of future return, which is predicated on forgetting/erasing the Israeli presence and Israeli-built spaces such as the archetypical Jewish Israeli city, Tel Aviv. Beyond casting an Israeli shadow over the Palestinian return narrative by invoking Tel Aviv, the formulation "the Lady from…" signifies a mysterious, intriguing, and unexpected presence.[37] Furthermore, in Arabic, "Al-Sayyida" denotes a form of respect, which indicates gravity and politeness as well as distance in the novel's initial evaluation of Dana. Together, these elements of the title mark "the lady from Tel Aviv," a central character of the novel, as one that is at once foreign, intriguing, and respected.

Another element of the title page confirms this expanded Israeli role in the story: Below the name of the author and title in Arabic appears the name "Dana Ahuva" printed in Hebrew characters. There is no immediate explanation of this, though we later learn it refers to the eponymous "lady from Tel Aviv." The insertion of her name in letters which are indecipherable to most readers of an Arabic novel but recognizable as Hebrew signifies a potentially disruptive Israeli presence in a narrative already defined as a Palestinian return journey. It suggests a possible departure from stock portrayals of Israelis found in many return narratives, and it marks the beginning of the airplane journey from London to Tel Aviv in which Walid and Dana meet. This encounter, and the resulting emergence of a complex, fully developed Israeli character who is *not* an

[37] Examples include Orson Wells' film noir *The Lady from Shanghai* and Henrik Ibsen's play *The Lady from the Sea*, the titles of which both refer to somewhat mysterious and alluring women who, like Dana in *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, lie at the center of a web of drama and intrigue. See Orson Welles, *The Lady from Shanghai* videorecording (Columbia TriStar Home Video, 2000); Henrik Ibsen, *The Lady from the Sea*, trans. David Eldridge (London: Methuen Drama, 2010).

enemy, serves as a revelation to Walid as well as to the reader and fundamentally reshapes the return experience.

Finally, the dedication that accompanies the title page presages another narrative split, that of the relationship between author, character, and text. The dedication thanks a number of the text's characters "who lived with us for three whole years."[38] The notion that an author's characters "lived with" him indicates a blurring of the distinction between character and author, suggesting that these characters' stories cannot be confined to a fictional text but that they escape that text and inhabit the world of the author. As Walid crosses the border, so too do the lines between fiction and reality become unsettled. The title page marks the origin a series of different shadows that this novel will cast over the return narrative as Walid makes his way to Gaza.

While the title page of *The Lady from Tel Aviv* appears at the first border as Walid departs London, a new title page appears as Walid arrives in Tel Aviv, that of Walid's novel-within-a-novel. Using a layout identical to the title page of *The Lady from Tel Aviv,* this title page lists Walid Dahman as author, and the title as *Ẓillān li-Bayt Wāhid* (*A House with Two Shadows*). The novel offers no explanation for the appearance of these pages at this point. Though referenced in the conversation between Walid and Dana, this title page is the first indication that *A House with Two Shadows* constitutes part of the novel itself. The notion of one house with "two shadows," of one entity creating multiple reflections, speaks not only to the presence of Dana alongside Walid on his journey, but to the intrusion of Walid's novel into his own return experience, which now appears to

[38] Al-Madhoun, *Al-Sayyida min Tall Abīb [The Lady from Tel Aviv]*, 47.

inspire two narratives. Yet the shadows are connected, a reminder that these parallel experiences and narratives cannot be fully separated, and that the border – the place in which these shadows appear – is the site of these intertwined interactions. This title and the formal shifts that accompany its appearance highlight the contradictions – simultaneous splits and mergers, blurring and clarifying lines – that embody the act of crossing into this place, this house with two shadows.

As if to affirm the ambiguity of the shadow created by al-Madhoun's metafictional story, the title page of Walid's novel does not clearly signify the beginning of Adel's story. Instead, the story picks up with Walid's journey right where it left off and even adheres to the previous chapter chronology, and Walid passes through border control in Tel Aviv.[39] This unexpected continuity exploits one of the many contradictory characteristics of the border: the complex and vital relationship between the interior and the exterior marked by any boundary. The spaces marked by the border exist in an uneasy dependence and inseparability: That which lies "inside" the border relies upon and cannot exist without that which lies "outside." Just as the shadow cannot exist without its source, the inside of the border cannot exist without its exterior counterpart. This relativity of the border replicates itself in the narrative structure: While the title page signifies a new border, another layer of textual interiority and exteriority, what follows "inside" the new text exists only in relation to that which preceded it "outside" of the new text, a reminder that borders can often exaggerate differences and obscure similarities. Despite its continuity, though, the text that follows the title page cannot be read in the same way as

[39] Ibid., 125.

that which preceded it, and the title page, this textual border, instead casts a shadow over the remainder of Walid's journey that follows.

The shadows that herald Walid's arrival in Palestine disrupt a pivotal moment in the traditional return narrative, the arrival in Palestine. The moment he arrives and touches the ground, Walid's expectations are confounded. He says that he has returned "in search of soil to kiss, but I find nothing except a paved walkway, and a crowded arrivals hall."[40] The "paved walkway" and "crowded arrivals hall" of Walid's first steps in Palestine replace the familiar lush rural landscape or majestic lost home that narratives of return typically portray. Instead of returning to the familiar Walid finds an unfamiliar and sterile space that does not conjure any of his memories of Palestine; instead, he recalls a story he heard from a British Jewish friend who traveled to Israel and Palestine and was told to kiss the earth upon arrival. She protested, saying that she is British and has no connection with this place. This prompts Walid to think of Dana's return to the land to which she belongs, and to interrogate his own relationship with this place.[41] Arrival provokes neither fond nor traumatic memories nor, overwhelming emotion, but rather a moment of questioning and self-doubt mediated by the experiences of (non-Palestinian) others. The affective and eternal connection with the land of Palestine found in Khalifeh, Kanafani, and others is replaced by the echoes of the narratives of others casting shadows over Walid's arrival in Palestine.

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 127.

A NARRATIVE OF ENCOUNTER

In the course of the wide-ranging exchange between Walid and Dana that takes place on the flight from London to Tel Aviv, Dana shares her thoughts on the seemingly intractable conflict between Palestinians and Israelis:

> In the country to which we are traveling together, where we will part ways together, there is one land and one house, until the sun rises and its rays fall upon it and its sprouts two shadows. Walid, we are two shadows of two tragedies that have come together in one place. What happened to us left black shadows over you, and what happened to you imbues us with an even blacker hue.[42]

In this passage, Dana invokes the shadow as a metaphor for the stories of two people, Israeli and Palestinian, who inhabit one land, whose shadows overlap and come into conflict, casting darkness upon the other. The image of dual shadows emanating from a single place also describes Walid and Dana, who have come together on a journey to this land, each beginning their return from the same place but headed in separate trajectories. They come together in an encounter, *liqā'* in Arabic. *Liqā'* denotes a meeting or an encounter; from the same root comes the word *tilqā'iyyan*, meaning automatically or spontaneously. The meeting between Walid and Dana is not planned, rather it happens by chance, a coincidental encounter that provides an impetus for a meaningful exchange between a Palestinian and Israeli. Through this exchange, Walid and Dana explore the possibility of forging a new set of narratives, dual shadows that come into contact by chance and emanate from a common starting point.

[42] Ibid., 107.

This chance encounter occurs on a flight from London to Tel Aviv. An airplane, in which travelers have left one location but have not arrived at another, is a type of border zone, an in-between space set apart from the everyday world. Marc Augé terms places like the airplane, the airport, border crossings, and transit camps "non-places." While the term "place" in anthropology refers to "culture localized in time and space," non-places are space in which people or goods are in transit or are otherwise decoupled from the specificities of time and space.[43] The latter, suggest Augé and others such as Jean Baudrillard, form an ever-increasing proportion of contemporary spatial experiences, as societies have become more mobile and technology has revolutionized mobility and communication. [44] As a result, these types of "non-places" have proliferated at an accelerated pace, much like the intensifying border zones in Palestine and Israel. These are tightly controlled spaces that are set apart from everyday life, and the means by which people interact with them are distinct, governed by texts and documents like passports and tickets.[45] These documents bring Walid and Dana together by assigning them adjacent seats. The non-place of the airplane, as a space that is neither home nor exile, creates the possibility of an encounter not possible in the traditional return narrative, which operates at the level of a binary opposition between exile and home. The

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[43] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso, 1995), 34.

[44] See Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*; Edward C. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, Ltd, 1976); Appadurai, *Modernity At Large*; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Wiley, 1992). Each of these theorists deploys distinct terms, definitions, and evaluations of the contemporary era's changing relationship with space and time, but all suggest a transformative shift from previous time periods.

[45] Augé, *Non-places*, 94.

airplane moves them outside of this binary and beyond the spaces of home and exile, and makes possible their encounter within a distinct non-place.

The encounter between the two begins slowly, and only after much hesitation on the part of both Walid and Dana does a dialogue open up between them. Walid takes his seat on the plane, and Dana catches his eye as she walks down the aisle toward her seat. As she approaches, he is struck by her beauty and relishes the thought of traveling with *al-jamīla* ("the beautiful woman") seated next to him.[46] His hopes are confirmed as she asks him if she is in the correct row, but her distinctive accent (in which the sound "r" in Arabic is rendered as "gh" to represent the guttural Hebrew pronunciation of this letter) clearly marks her as Israeli, and anxiety appears alongside his excitement. Walid wonders if this is mere coincidence, or if the Mossad orchestrated it to allow Dana, presumably "well-trained in a special style of surveillance and techniques for luring victims," to gather information from him.[47] Walid's reaction reveals a reflexive, almost instinctive anxiety towards the Israeli that causes him to assume a similar hesitance on the part of Dana (or other passengers) towards him. As a result, he is afraid to reveal that he is Palestinian.[48] Walid's anxiety stems not only from fear of the Israeli other but of the Israeli other's perception of himself. His concern with her reaction reveals, though, his continued interest in her despite her Israeliness.

Indeed, his fascination with Dana (*al-jamīla*) grows and produces a desire to know this Israeli woman despite his reluctance to reveal himself. Her beauty piques his

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[46] Al-Madhoun, *Al-Sayyida min Tall Abīb [The Lady from Tel Aviv]*, 55.
[47] Ibid., 57.
[48] Ibid., 93.

interest and he begins to ask her questions. However, his hesitance remains, and as her body language reveals her interest in knowing him, he begins to regret his decision to engage her: "I am pushing myself towards the questions that I have been trying to escape since the start of this journey."[49] Her presence pushes him out of his comfort zone, just as it pushes the return narrative away from its familiar tropes. But her openness and willingness to reveal herself relaxes him, particularly once she unexpectedly begins crying and he offers her a tissue. When she finally asks the question "Where are you from?" he overcomes his anxiety and answers her truthfully.[50] Walid soon learns that Dana is a famous Israeli actress who is in a secret relationship with the son of an Arab leader, and that her tears were an expression of her fear and uncertainty about the viability of this relationship.[51] The perfunctory exchange of words between seatmates gives way to a genuine discussion between the two, and a Palestinian-Israeli encounter that is neither clichéd nor acrimonious.

The presence of a sympathetic, humanized Israeli on an analogous journey of return reconfigures the return experience and makes it impossible for this narrative to reach the same conclusions as Kanafani and Khalifeh. This is not to say that al-Madhoun's novel does not articulate a claim of Palestinian rights or a critique of the occupation. Walid's frequent references to his birthplace of *Asdūd* (now Ashdod, in present-day Israel), serves as a reminder of his belonging to this place, and he often notes the suffering and violence imposed by occupation. Yet this claim exists *alongside* Dana,

[49] Ibid., 76.
[50] Ibid., 93.
[51] Ibid., 82.

who is a human, knowable, relatable other, showing that the two are not mutually exclusive. Dana's insertion into the story, made possible in the in-between spaces of air travel and borders, complicates and disrupts what is presumed to be a straightforward narrative trajectory. While this liminal encounter ends at border control at the Tel Aviv airport into Israel Walid's airborne encounter with Dana echoes throughout the rest of his journey to Gaza and comes to define as a journey fundamentally reshaped by this encounter.

The effects of the chance encounter reverberate through the novel's structure as well, as the story splits into narrations from the alternating perspectives of Walid and Dana. They recount their airplane journey together in alternation, in which a chapter narrated by Walid and labeled "he" (*huwa*) is followed by a chapter narrated by Dana labeled "she" (*hiya*), emphasizing the two separate narratives that come together in an encounter on the plane. By assigning first-person narrators labels in the third person, the novel unveils their status as a literary construct. Just as Walid's arrival in Palestine is mediated by the narratives of others, the juxtaposition of alternating narrators reminds the reader of the limits of each narrative, which can only exist in relation to other, distinct but intertwined narratives. The formerly unitary narrative of return is now one of several.

The use of multiple narrators in Palestinian literature is not a new literary technique, but the manner in which al-Madhoun uses it sets him apart. Its use in modern Arabic literature has been traced to the influence of William Faulkner, whose use of multiple narrators and other techniques such as stream of consciousness inspired a number of Arab authors to begin to experiment formally by way of Palestinian author

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's Arabic translations.[52] One such author was Ghassan Kanafani, who has acknowledged Faulkner's influence on his novel *That's Left to You* (*Mā Tabaqqā Lakum*), which contains multiple narrators, including "time" and the "desert."[53] Kanafani deploys a similar technique in *Men in the Sun* (*Rijāl fī al-Shams*), which follows three Palestinian refugees as they try to make their way from Iraq to Kuwait in search of employment.[54] However, al-Madhoun's use of this technique represents an important break from earlier deployments. *Men in the Sun* uses multiple perspectives to draw attention to the dispersal of the Palestinians after 1948 by following each character's journey to a rendezvous point to cross into Kuwait. In the end, the deaths of all three refugees serve as a reminder of the Palestinian people's shared fate (despite its fragmentation), as an indictment of Arab silence and duplicity towards the Palestinian cause, and as a call to action and solidarity.[55]

Kanafani harnesses his employment of multiple perspectives to arouse sympathy and anger towards the treatment of Palestinian refugees by giving several voices to a singular experience that come together at the border, but the *The Lady from Tel Aviv* uses an Israeli voice of contrast to emphasize the inability of a singular experience to capture the complex reality of the place to which Walid returns. Dana's inclusion as a narrator creates a form of parity between the two, and the alternation between the Palestinian and

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[52] See Tawfiq Yousef, "The Reception of William Faulkner in the Arab World," *American Studies International* 33, no. 2 (October 1, 1995): 41–48, doi:10.2307/41279343; Azouqa, "Ghassan Kanafani and William Faulkner."

[53] Kanafani, *Mā Tabaqqá Lakum [All That's Left to You]*.

[54] Kanafani, *Rijāl fī al-Shams [Men in the Sun]*.

[55] Muhammad Siddiq, "On Ropes of Memory: Narrating the Palestinian Refugees," in *Mistrusing Refugees*, ed. E. Valentine Daniel and John Chr. Knudsen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 95.

the Israeli forges distinct but connected narrative trajectories out of perspectives that are so often placed in diametric opposition. While Kanafani uses multiplicity in service of a single narrative – thereby maintaining what Stefan Meyer calls a "formal cohesiveness"[56] – al-Madhoun uses multiple voices to question the possibility of a single, unifying experience of return.

The alternating narrative structure shifts as the encounter comes to a close, and the alternation of chapters between Dana and Walid ends once they arrive in Tel Aviv, after which a new set of alternating narrators appears. Upon arrival Dana no longer narrates her story in first person; instead, a third person narrator labeled "the narrator" (*al-rāwī*) tells the story of her angst-ridden homecoming in Tel Aviv. To further complicate matters, once Walid enters Gaza, the third-person narrator telling Dana's story also disappears, leaving Walid as the sole narrator for this portion of the novel. Then, in the novel's concluding chapters, Walid's first-person account of his return to London alternates – and conflicts – with that of "the narrator." These changing narrative voices create an unstable and occasionally unreliable narrative. As the two narratives that came together on the flight part ways, the novel reflects this distance while still binding them together, like two shadows that split into separate trajectories from a common departure point.

These narrative configurations shift and fall apart at border crossings, also seen in *Men in the Sun*, which suggests a vital link between the border and narrative structure. The narratives of the three refugees in *Men in the Sun* come together at the border

[56] Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel*, 268–269.

between Iraq and Kuwait, as does the death (silencing) of these men. It is the site of both (re)unification and tragedy and produces both, as well as the political critique that emerges from the latter. However, in *The Lady from Tel Aviv,* the border is the space in which narratives strands diverge, the common origin of the split shadows. It is a point of fracture, in which new narrative strands appear as shadows, fragments breaking off of another, while other narratives, like Dana's at the Gaza crossing, disappear without a trace.

The inversion of the return narrative, however, is not simply the Israeli presence as a condition of its existence, but the productive nature of this presence. Walid discusses with Dana his main character (Adel) and the pursuit of his long lost lover Layla, which prompts him to rethink the way in which he wishes the story to unfold. He says to Dana: "Your presence rescued me [*wujūdik anqadhanī*] from a narrative that could have been limited to telling a traditional love story between Layla and Adel."[57] He credits her with an act of salvation, suggesting that a "traditional" narrative is some form of trap, that he fears simply rehashing old tropes. Dana's presence renders another "traditional" narrative – the narrative of return to Palestine in which the Israeli primarily appears as a manifestation of the violence of occupation, casting dark shadows over the Palestinian return – inoperable. Instead, Dana prompts Walid to produce a more complex, multifaceted story for his characters that unfolds alongside his own trip to Gaza. In place of familiar tropes of return, Walid and Dana give birth to a new set of stories, dual

[57] Al-Madhoun, *Al-Sayyida min Tall Abīb [The Lady from Tel Aviv]*, 104.

narratives and shadows that emanate from the common origin of the airborne encounter across the same land.

DETHRONING THE AUTHOR

The novel returns to the metaphor of the shadow to complicate the relationship between the author and his text and to interrogate the meaning of authorship itself. While waiting to cross the Erez crossing point into Gaza, Walid describes the interminable wait at the cold, hostile border checkpoint: "We shivered together, Adel and I, as if we were one entity of shadow and truth."[58] By framing his wait at the Gaza border as an experience shared with his character Adel, Walid articulates an unorthodox understanding of the relationship between author and character. The character does not spring from the author but they are one and the same, mutually dependent equals negotiating a formative experience together. In the merging of author and character, Walid proclaims a new model of authorship, one in which author does not exert control over his character but instead merges with him, becoming "one entity of shadow and truth."

Earlier in the novel Walid presents and then deconstructs a more conventional understanding of the role of author, that of a master puppeteer, setting the stage for the emergence of the newly merged author-character. During his conversation with Dana, he tells her that the two of them are in fact characters in a novel being written by someone else: "We are both characters in a novel the events of which are being formed now. An author who knows us better than we know ourselves is animating us, and I don't even

[58] Ibid., 174.

know the name of the novel of which he has made me its hero."[59] By revealing the existence of this heretofore hidden author-puppeteer, Walid calls attention to the fictionality of the events to this point, and to the narrative of return as a construct.

However, he also subverts the power of this omniscient author, as this very act of exposure creates the possibility of its subversion. The coherence of the fictional narrative is contingent on the enforcement of an absolute boundary between author and text, but once Walid and Dana become aware of their status as fiction it becomes possible for them to escape the limits of the text. Walid perceives the possibilities this awareness creates and suggests that they ask the author – who "can cooperate with us and take us beyond the text" – to put her name on the novel's cover, written in Hebrew letters ("mysterious words"), exactly as we see in the title page discussed above.[60] In this way the characters shape and reshape the construction of their own story, exiting the bounds of the text. They wrest control from the all-knowing author, whose puppet characters instead become his shadows, emerging from him but transcending his limits.

By the end of the flight, the contours of new narratives made possible by this act of subversion begin to reveal themselves as Walid and Dana take control of the narrative and split it. Walid declares that the unnamed "author" will follow Dana's story, while he will "leave it to me to narrate the events of what remains of my trip and of Adel al-Bashity's trip…and all of that will take place in a separate text," a proto-novel that emerges from "what is taking place right now," the conversation between Walid and

[59] Ibid., 104.
[60] Ibid., 105.

Dana.[61] The story overspills its bounds and creates what Elias Khoury calls a "text without limits." Khoury argues, channeling Roland Barthes, that the age of the all-knowing author of the likes of Mahfouz and Kanafani is at an end, to be replaced by a return to literature in which the author is absent or erased.[62] The *Lady from Tel Aviv* does not completely erase the author but it neuters him. In the shift from linear return narrative to a self-consciously ambiguous and fragmented story, the author as prophet is unceremoniously dethroned from his pedestal. No longer master of the text, he becomes one of many character-authors.

The rupture of the border, then, appears within the author himself, as he splits and fragments while passing through successive border crossings. The figure of the exile, like Usama in *Wild Thorns* or Said in *Returning to Haifa*, who returns heroically to save the nation from complacency or to inspire new forms of resistance, now collapses within himself at the border. The border produces a form of collective fragmentation – of narratives, of memory, of authors – as people are herded through the turnstiles of the checkpoint and passport control at the non-place of the international airport. In the process, a new aesthetics emerge from this fragmentation and refraction at the border, a new literary genre that the novel here represents. The border functions both within and outside of the text and is at once material and fictional, refiguring narratives and encounters as it appears again and again along the journey to Gaza.

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Khoury, "Mawt al-Mu'allif [Death of the Author]," 73. Here again we see 1001 Nights as a new model, and as a precursor of the metafiction we find in *Lady from Tel Aviv*.

CONCLUSION: STRAY BULLETS AND STRAY NARRATIVES

If the journeys of Dana, Walid, and Walid's characters disrupt the relationship of author and text and thereby subvert the return narrative and the authority of the author-prophet that produces these narratives, what type of narrative emerges in its place? The unpredictable chaos that Walid encounters upon arrival in Gaza offers the beginnings of an answer. Life in Gaza constantly disrupts Walid's attempts to construct and shape his experiences and narratives. An explosion that rocks his mother's house derails one attempt to correspond with Dana, which prompts him to meditate on the randomness and unpredictability that violence wreaks on Gaza. Between the bombing of the Israeli warplanes and the "stray bullets" (*raṣāṣa ṭā'isha*) that killed Walid's best friend, life in Gaza is characterized by "roving death that chooses its victims randomly" that strangles all plans and hopes for the future.[63] It is constantly interrupted, rerouted, and cut down in the violence.[64]

Walid's observations of life there foreground the violence and hardship he finds in Israeli-occupied Gaza between the horrors of blockade, checkpoints, and the pervasive, sinister presence of Israeli settlements,[65] and the armed militias that wreak havoc on Gaza's streets. It is a place where people are forced to "live for the death that has already come to pass, and the death that will come."[66] The optimism of the new narratives that Walid and Dana imagine fades away under the black cloud of bombs and bullets falling

[63] Al-Madhoun, *Al-Sayyida min Tall Abīb [The Lady from Tel Aviv]*, 308.
[64] Ibid., 309.
[65] The Israeli settlements in Gaza mentioned in the novel were destroyed with the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005. Though Israeli restrictions on movement within Gaza were lifted, a blockade has severely restricted the flow of people in and out of the territory, and incursions and air strikes remain commonplace.
[66] Al-Madhoun, *Al-Sayyida min Tall Abīb [The Lady from Tel Aviv]*, 308.

over Gaza. In a parallel fashion, through the metafictional disruption of the hierarchies of author, text, and character, the return narrative spins out of control in Gaza and begin to reflect the "random" (*'ashwā'ī*) and "stray" (*ṭā'ish*) nature of life there. The adjective *tā'ish* not only carries the meaning of stray but also refers to someone who is reckless, unwise, or mad, embodied in the phrase *shāb ṭā'ish*, a "wayward" or "delinquent" youth. We can read the stray, delinquent narratives of *The Lady from Tel Aviv* in a similar manner: In a place enclosed by borders and bombs, the narrative of return becomes infected with a form of delinquency that resists the attempts of Walid to subdue it. It becomes an uncontrollable, "delinquent" narrative that, through its myriad encounters and border crossings, subverts all limits of text and narrative and instead careens haphazardly like a stray bullet, striking anything in its path.

In its transformation into a stray, out of control set of narratives, *The Lady from Tel Aviv* declares an end to the narrative of return as a political project. The trope of return as articulated in the works of Khalifeh, Kanafani, and others, is predicated on the ability of the returning exile-author to harness the fresh perspective of temporal and spatial distance to shed new light on the Palestinian dilemma and the steps needed to rectify it. In *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, however, the author finds his authority disrupted, subverted, and ultimately decimated by the intervention of forces beyond his control. The author goes astray, like a wayward son (*al-ibn al-ḍāll*) who becomes lost (*ḍalla*) on the way home, who goes astray on the return journey.

The narration of the return, in its journey from outside to inside, is interrupted, rerouted, and fractured at the border. The border renders the experiences of living as a

Palestinian in exile and as a Palestinian in Gaza mutually unintelligible, as the attempt to narrate and represent the other side of the border goes astray. Moreover, in its refusal or inability to hand down a verdict on the condition of the Palestinian struggle, *The Lady from Tel Aviv* situates the ability to evaluate the present reality of Palestine not with those who reside abroad but with those who live a "stray" life beneath the shadows and bombs of Gaza. Those looking from afar, Walid but also even Dana, can revel in the chance encounter and imagine new narratives, but all such dreams fall victim to the harsh realities of the land with two shadows.

The inability of the returning exile to narrate and interpret his experience also suggests that *The Lady from Tel Aviv*'s place on the Palestinian literary map is not simply as a parodic response to earlier narratives of return but also can be read as a coda to another Palestinian novel that revels in unknowability and subverts and upends narrative conventions: Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *In Search of Walid Masoud* (*al-Baḥth 'an Walīd Mas'ūd*; 1978).[67] Jabra's novel tells the story of a Palestinian intellectual, also named Walid, who lives in Baghdad but disappears in the no-man's land of the Iraq-Syria border. The novel attempts to decipher the mystery of his disappearance by gathering testimony from his friends, his lovers, and a disjointed and rambling tape recording of Walid's last thoughts found in the car he left behind. Some fear he has committed suicide, but it appears most likely that he has fled to join the Palestinian resistance, to

[67] Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *al-Baḥth 'an Walīd Mas'ūd [In Search of Walid Masoud]* (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfah al-Jadīdah, 1989).Thank you to Zeina Halabi for pointing out to me the overlap between the novels of al-Madhoun and Jabra.

become a *fida'ī*.[68] Disillusioned with the position of the exiled Palestinian, Walid Masoud abandons a comfortable life in Baghdad to return and join the struggle, and in the process he falls silent. Walid Dahman, inhabiting a post-Oslo political and intellectual landscape vastly transformed from the milieu of 1970s Baghdad, does not join the resistance, but he, like Walid Masoud, must abandon his authorial voice in search of Palestine and the meaning of return. Only then can the stray, anarchic narrative of the realities of Palestinian life under occupation emerge from the shadows.

[68] For an analysis of Jabra's novel as a melancholic declaration of the death of the Arab intellectual, see Zeina G. Halabi, *Writing Melancholy the Death of the Intellectual in Modern Arabic Literature* (Austin, Tex: University of Texas, 2011), https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/ETD-UT-2011-08-3998/HALABI-DISSERTATION.pdf.

Chapter 3

Exilic Borders: Crossing as Estrangement in the Novels of Sayed Kashua

In Israeli-Palestinian author Sayed Kashua's Hebrew-language novel *Dancing Arabs* (*'Aravim Roḳdim*, 2002), the Palestinian protagonist describes a set of strategies, which he calls "camouflage efforts" (*ma'amatsey hasva'a*), that he deploys to avoid being perceived as Palestinian.[1] He wears coke-bottle glasses and sideburns to make himself look Jewish, and he blares Hebrew music from the Army Radio station as he drives. He undertakes these "camouflage" efforts to disguise himself as a Jewish Israeli. Specifically, he hopes to cross through a police checkpoint without being stopped. This is one of the protagonist's many attempts to cross through checkpoints, security lines, airports, and other spaces of transit and intersection in which movement is regulated, controlled, and channeled. The protagonist attempts to cross these borders through the use of "camouflage," which indicates a form of surreptitious crossing, of a guerrilla

[1] Sayed Kashua, *'Aravim Roḳdim [Dancing Arabs]* (Ben-Shemen: Modan, 2002), 148.

action. It recalls the Palestinian *fidā'iyy*, the resistance fighters who infiltrated Israel to stage attacks from neighboring countries, like Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's character Walid Masoud in the previous chapter. Yet while the *fidā'iyy* infiltrates in order to reclaim, the protagonist seeks to cross surreptitiously through borders in order to inhabit the other side. This juncture of two very different types of border crossing, the infiltration of the resistance fighter and the passing of Kashua's protagonist, points to the possibility of reading Kashua's work, specifically its engagement with borders and crossing them, as another manifestation of the bordering of cultural production that has occurred in the post-Oslo period. While al-Madhoun's novel stages this bordering through the breakdown and fragmentation of the return narrative and the returning exile, I show here how Kashua's works produces this bordering within the narratives of Palestinians who hold Israeli citizenship, who are known in Arabic as "Palestinians of the interior (*al-dākhil*)." If the return journey crosses numerous borders, the position of inside provides no reprieve, as "interior" borders also necessitate constant acts of negotiation and crossing. These repeated moments of crossing, as I will show, produce a new aesthetics of exile and estrangement at and through borders, from the inside.

Over the past decade Sayed Kashua, a Palestinian citizen of Israel, has become a literary and cultural phenomenon in Israel. He has published three well-received bestselling novels: *Dancing Arabs*, *Let It Be Morning* (*Ve-Yehi Boker*, 2006), and *Second Person Singular (Guf Sheni Yachid*, 2010). He writes a weekly column for *Ha'aretz*, Israel's most prestigious newspaper. *Arab Labor*, which Kashua writes, is the first

bilingual Hebrew-Arabic television show in Israel and just completed its fourth season.[2] It is the top-rated sitcom in Israel, and recently swept the Israeli equivalent of the Emmys.[3] Finally, Kashua has written a screenplay for a film based on his work, to be directed by the Israeli filmmaker Eran Riklis and scheduled for release in 2013. The film, entitled *Dancing Arabs*, combines the narrative of the eponymous novel with elements from Kashua's latest work, *Second Person Singular*. As a result of these successes, Kashua has come to occupy a cultural position in Israel that is perhaps unprecedented for a Palestinian.

He is not, of course, the first Palestinian to write in Hebrew, and he belongs to a small but significant cadre of authors who have done so. Kashua's most notable predecessor is Anton Shammas, whose 1987 Hebrew novel *Arabesques* (*Arabesḳot*) created a firestorm of critical interest. A plethora of scholars, fellow authors, and literary critics weighed in on the implications of Hebrew literature written by a Palestinian for both the state of the Hebrew language and of Israeli literature and culture more broadly.[4] In the intervening decades, scholars have expanded the scope of these analyses, looking at questions of translation, space, and passing within works by Shammas and Kashua.[5] These analyses almost always position these writers in relation to Hebrew literature, as

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[2] Gil Hochberg, "To Be or Not to Be an Israeli Arab: Sayed Kashua and the Prospect of Minority Speech-Acts," *Comparative Literature* 62, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 69.

[3] Gili Izikovitch, "New Talent Unseats Old Favorites at Israeli TV Awards," *Haaretz*, January 13, 2013, http://www.haaretz.com/culture/new-talent-unseats-old-favorites-at-israeli-tv-awards.premium-1.493712.

[4] See, for example, Hannan Hever, "Hebrew in an Israeli Arab Hand: Six Miniatures on Anton Shammas's 'Arabesques'," trans. Orin D. Gensler, *Cultural Critique* no. 7 (October 1, 1987): 47–76.

[5] For instance, Karen Grumberg has studied Kashua in *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature*. Gil Hochberg has written about Shammas in *In Spite of Partition*, and Kashua in "To Be or Not to Be an Israeli Arab."

befits not only the language of his works but the Israeli audience and institutions that have provided the impetus for his success.

However, Kashua's works have resonated beyond the Israeli milieu in which they were produced and published, both in the U.S. and Europe and in the Arab world. Kashua's works and activities garner attention from the Arabic-language Palestinian press.[6] In a first for Palestinians writing in Hebrew, Kashua's novels first two novels have appeared in Arabic translations commissioned by publishing houses in Cairo and Beirut.[7] In this way, Kashua has become not only a source of insight for Israelis into the experiences of the country's large and oft-ignored Palestinian minority, but also a means for other Palestinians and Arabs to peer into the lives of Palestinians living in Israel, in the "inside" (*al-dākhil*). By creating the possibility of "peering in," Kashua's works have begun to pierce the wall between Palestinian Israelis and the rest of the Arab world on a literary level literature, emphasizing the importance of analyzing his Hebrew works within a larger Palestinian and Arab context. In light of this broadening reach of Kashua's works in the Arab world, in this chapter I consider his novels within the context of the border aesthetic that emerges from a post-resistance moment in Palestinian cultural production. To read these works as Palestinian is not to negate their status as works of Hebrew literature, but to acknowledge their simultaneous intervention in Hebrew literature, Israeli literature, *and* Palestinian literature, and their ability to destabilize these

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[6] For instance, Hassan Sha'alan, "How Does Sayed Kashua Attack the Gaza Invasion in Hebrew?," *Panet*, January 8, 2009, http://www.panet.co.il/online/articles/1/2/S-171279,1,2.html.

[7] *Dancing Arabs* was published as *'Arab Rāqisūn* by Markaz al-Maḥrūsa in Cairo, and *Let it Be Morning* was published as *Li-yakun Ṣabāḥan* by Dār al-Sāqī in Beirut, both in 2011. His third novel, *Second Person Singular*, remains unpublished in Arabic.

categories, as befits the ambiguities and gaps contained within the category "Israeli Palestinian."

In this chapter, I explore acts of crossing borders by two of Kashua's characters, the protagonist and narrator of *Dancing Arabs* and one of the two main characters of *Second Person Singular*, Amir. Unlike Walid's crossings in the previous chapter, the borders Kashua's characters encounter are not international but exist within territory entirely controlled by Israel. *Dancing Arabs* tells the life story of an unnamed protagonist from his childhood in the Palestinian village of Tira to his time at a prestigious boarding school in Jerusalem, and finally his life as a depressed, alcoholic, unhappily married adult. Along the way, he becomes obsessed with distancing himself from his Palestinian origins and attempts to act on this obsession with humorous efforts to disguise himself as Jewish that often falter. *Second Person Singular* takes on a more serious and less satirical tone as it alternates between two protagonists living in East Jerusalem, a struggling young Palestinian man named Amir and a successful middle-aged lawyer. Amir lives a lonely life as a stranger with no family ties and works an unrewarding job as a social worker. Out of boredom, he begins a night job caring for a Jewish man named Yonatan who was severely injured in a car accident years before but remains alive, albeit brain dead. Slowly Amir begins to use Yonatan's ID and clothes to disguise himself as Jewish, and eventually he even adopts Yonatan's identity, family and aspirations as his own. His act of transformation, however, disrupts the lawyer's orderly if empty life, and the lawyer spends much of the novel trying to unravel the mystery of Amir and Yonatan. The novel

repeatedly stages the moments of intersection and transformation between Amir and Yonatan within, at, and through border spaces, which is where I position my analysis.

I begin by showing that *Dancing Arabs* uses crossing to stage an intergenerational shift from resistance to estrangement at the border. I read checkpoints situated within Israel not simply as blockages but also as a crossing points, a space that regulates and modulates movement. As in the passage above, crossing the checkpoint produces shifts in language, name, space, and time. I argue that these shifts represent gaps and disjunctures created by border spaces, and that these gaps produce forms of estrangement similar to that which Julia Kristeva suggests emerges from within oneself.[8] I conclude by suggesting that while al-Madhoun's novel stages and unsettles the return from exile through a series of stray narratives, Kashua's work renders the "inside" a space of *ghurba* (estrangement and exile) produced through repeated border crossings. I start my analysis by using *Dancing Arabs* to theorize the relationship between resistance as a form of political engagement, particularly the notion of *ṣumūd* (steadfastness), estrangement, and crossing borders. I trace a shift from the former to the latter as it occurs at the border, before turning to a close reading of this dynamic in *Second Person Singular*.

FROM RESISTANCE TO CROSSING

In *Dancing Arabs*, the protagonist's father espouses a strong commitment to the notion of Palestinian resistance. He repeatedly proclaims his love for the Egyptian President and pan-Arab hero Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose speeches he remembers so well that he "can

[8] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon Roudiez, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1.

recite them by heart."[9] The protagonist uncovers a series of newspaper clips that show that his father was imprisoned as a young man on accusations that he took part in a plot to blow up the cafeteria at Hebrew University while he was a student there during the 1960s.[10] However, the father's response to this claim was to say, somewhat ambiguously, that the newspapers "lie."[11] The father constantly berates his children for their lack of national enthusiasm, saying that there are young children chanting their support for the PLO, while he shouts at the protagonist and his brothers "for not even knowing what PLO stands for."[12] In contrast to the father, his children have little understanding of the concepts and terms associated with resistance; the protagonist recounts war games he played with his brother in which each boy called his group the "Fedayeen" (in Arabic, *fidā'iyyīn*, Palestinian resistance fighters). However, they do so not because they support the resistance fighters but rather because "Father had always told us the Fedayeen were the best."[13] The Fedayeen are voided of all meaning as a political entity and a signifier of resistance, and instead become a means of amusement, fodder for the games of children.

The gap in knowledge and interest in resistance between the main character and his father sets the stage for a confrontation between the two that comes later in the protagonist's childhood. After his first week at a majority Jewish boarding school in West Jerusalem, the main character, then a teenager, travels by bus to his hometown of Tira for the Rosh Hashanah holiday break. The bus comes to a checkpoint (*maḥsom*) near Ben

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[9] Sayed Kashua, *Dancing Arabs*, trans. Miriam Shlesinger (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 16.
[10] Kashua, *'Aravim Roḳdim [Dancing Arabs]*, 36.
[11] Ibid., 16.
[12] Kashua, *Dancing Arabs*, 17.
[13] Ibid., 28.

Gurion Airport. While checkpoints are most commonly found within Palestinian territories and between those territories and Israel, they also exist inside of Israel proper. Police frequently set up temporary or permanent roadblocks near sensitive areas, as seen in this passage at the airport. They also appear often in heavily Palestinian areas of Israel, such as near entrances to Arab villages, and Palestinians, like the protagonist, are often singled out for extra scrutiny despite their status as Israeli citizens.

At the checkpoint, a soldier forces the protagonist and his classmate Adel to disembark. Their appearance marks them as Palestinian, and therefore too much of a security threat to enter the airport grounds, so they must wait until the bus leaves the airport to reboard.[14] Adel remains unfazed, but the protagonist is traumatized and refuses to get back on the bus. He says, "I screamed, I cried like a little child."[15] The roadblock, the *maḥsom*, which is derived from the word *ḥasam*, meaning to block, produces this outburst, this breakdown into tears and screams that renders the protagonist a "little child." He calls his father but is so upset that he can barely talk, and later on when his father arrives he remains silent.[16] The blockage of the *maḥsom* mutes him, renders him unable to speak.

His father drives to the checkpoint to fetch him and take him home. However, instead of offering sympathy, his father mocks him and laughs at him, calling him a "frightened little boy" for reacting so dramatically to a minor, common incident.[17] His

[14] Kashua, *'Aravim Roḳdim [Dancing Arabs]*, 72.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 73.

father shares the story of his own experiences at the roadblock while traveling on the same bus. He says that he was never selected for inspection, but that he subjected himself to the experience anyway, "They didn't notice I was an Arab. Every time the soldiers told an Arab to get off, I'd get up and shout, 'Take me off too, I'm an Arab!'"[18] For the father, the willingness to bear the mistreatment at the checkpoint is a point of pride, even if this means facing discrimination. He describes a form of *ṣumūd*, a mode of resistance that valorizes insistence and perseverance in the face of hardship, which Raja Shehada describes as a middle ground between "mute submission and blind hate."[19] It arose out of a desire not to repeat the catastrophic expulsions and flight of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948; from now on, Palestinians would stay put no matter the hardships it creates, cling to their land and homes, and stand firm in the face of harassment and danger.[20] The father, in instructing his son to stand up proudly, to grin and bear the harassment of the checkpoint, advocates a form of resistance.

However, the protagonist rejects this advice and instead directs his anger at his father. He declares, "How I hated him then."[21] He calls him a "son of a bitch" (*ben-zona*) for lying to him and knowingly subjecting him to this humiliation without warning, which he sees as a betrayal of the father's duties. Faced with this betrayal, he rebels against his father, his generation, and the model of resistance he espouses. His father's response to the checkpoint does not convince the protagonist, it alienates him from his

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[18] Kashua, *Dancing Arabs*, 101.
[19] See Raja Shehadeh, *The Third Way, a Journal of Life in the West Bank* (New York: Quartet Books, 1982).
[20] Ball, *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective*, 90.
[21] Kashua, *Dancing Arabs*, 99.

father, prompts him to call him a liar and a son of a bitch. This moment of alienation, of distancing from the father parallels the alienation of the post-resistance generation from the ideals of their forbearers. It recalls what Barbara Harlow terms the literature of alienation (*al-ightirāb*) that came after many of the literatures of resistance that she analyzes in *Resistance Literature*.[22] She writes that alienation first emerged from a group of disillusioned writers, among them Sonallah Ibrahim, who declared themselves a "fatherless generation" that rejects traditional cultural forms.[23] While she situates her analysis in the context of a particular form of literary production, it is useful for understanding the generational dynamic in *Dancing Arabs*, particularly since it emerges in the wake of the death of Nasser, an event with which the protagonist's father refuses to come to terms. He walks around repeating Nasser's speeches and catch phrases, as if to keep him alive through his words.

While the protagonist's rejection of his father's rhetoric of resistance and *ṣumūd* does not render him "fatherless," it does constitute a form of *ightirāb*, of alienation or distancing from the model the father espouses. The term *ightirāb*, which is derived from the same root as *gharīb*, meaning "stranger," and *ghurba*, or "exile," points to a form of estrangement, or exile that emerges from the protagonist's rejection of his father's act of *ṣumūd*. Julia Kristeva reminds us that exile, alienation, and estrangement do not by necessity require the physical distance seen in *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, but can exist in much closer proximity. The stranger, she writes, "is the hidden face of our identity, the

[22] Harlow, "Return to Haifa," 164.
[23] Harlow, *Resistance Literature*, 164–166.

space that wrecks our abode."[24] The stranger, thus, is not defined *a priori* but rather is a category that individuals and societies produce and reproduce. In *Letters of a Stranger* (*Risā'il al-Gharība*, 2004), Hoda Barakat situates the experience of *ghurba*, a word that captures the alienation inherent in exile, in moments of disruption and estrangement. Barakat describes the *ghurba* produced by the sounds of nearby explosions in a café in Beirut that serve as a reminder that the once familiar city becomes more and more alien with each bomb.[25] The subtle distance that grows between friends with each passing year and return visit, in the movement between home and the place of residence reproduces and reinforces the estrangement of the exile, the "stranger."[26] Thus *ghurba* emerges not only from a momentous instance of expulsion, of permanent exteriority as seen in *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, but also from the repeated daily experiences of life as a stranger, whether one has physically migrated or remained in a place that has become hostile. For Kashua's protagonist, the act of crossing is both a rejection of his father's *ṣumūd* and an expression of the estrangement that appears when *ṣumūd* is no longer a possibility.

By staging this physical act of crossing through language, in the movement from Arabic to Hebrew, the protagonist inhabits a foreign language, which Kristeva identifies as a form of estrangement that produces what she terms the "silence of polyglots."[27] This silence emerges from one's imperfect grasp of the foreign language, and specifically the knowledge of this imperfection that creates a reluctance to speak, a hesitation. In the

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[24] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 1.
[25] Hoda Barakat, *Rasā'il al-Gharība [Letters of a Stranger]* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 2004), 50–51.
[26] Ibid., 30–31.
[27] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 15.

novel, the knowledge of imperfection produces both silence and a desire to overcome the silence, as the protagonist seeks to rectify his linguistic imperfections. However, this attempt can also produce a different form of estrangement, one described by Jacques Derrida in *Monolingualism of the Other*. Derrida, a French-Algerian Jew, is haunted by the deprival of access to a mother tongue, a native language.[28] While aware that many generations before, his ancestors spoke Arabic, and that the traces of this difference remain and distinguish him from other French speakers, he also knows he cannot access this lost linguistic heritage. The community of Algerian Jews, he writes, was subject to a "triple dissociation," from Arabic and Berber language and culture, from French language and culture, and from Jewish memory and history.[29] Derrida is left with the French of his education, but it is a language that belongs to others, not to him. He is not born into this language but rather crosses into it, as he journeys across the Mediterranean from Algeria to France.[30] The act of crossing thus produces an awareness that he speaks and writes in a language not his own produces a "neurotic" obsession with "pure" French, a desire to be "more French than the French themselves."[31] For Derrida, this knowledge produces not a general silence like Kristeva, but rather a desire to adhere to and enforce a new form of language, a pure French that emerges from the estrangement of crossing.

Kashua, in a 2012 column for *Haaretz*, describes a related form of insistence on linguistic purity. He recounts an incident on the set of *Arab Labor* in which a Jewish

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[28] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 54.
[29] Ibid., 55.
[30] Ibid., 44.
[31] Ibid., 49.

Israeli production assistant walked into his office and exclaimed in Arabic with a "terrible accent," "Kiif Halak ya Zalameh?"[32] Kashua notes that this is probably the only polite phrase in Arabic that the man had learned during his military service. Kashua reacts angrily and yells at the man to get out of his office. He explains that he resents that after having learned Hebrew, he is still subject to a former soldier's "garbled and slow" Arabic as if he were a janitor, or "standing at one of the checkpoints." Arabic invokes "standing" at the checkpoint, recalling the interminable and helpless waiting for permission to cross that many Palestinians experience in this space.[33] Abdel Fattah Kilito describes the experience of being forced to speak one's own language by a stranger as a form of humiliation, silencing, and even castration.[34] The production assistant's Arabic is thus a means of reminding Kashua of "his place," that is to say, stuck at a checkpoint, unable to cross, rather than in an office in Jerusalem. Kashua responds to this moment of humiliation by turning to Hebrew. He deploys his own (superior) skills to return the favor in the production assistant's language, which he uses "to shout eloquently at a worker who tried to slight me." While the soldier's Arabic is "garbled and slow," Kashua's Hebrew is "eloquent," it flows smoothly, moving Kashua away from the choppy language of the checkpoint and claiming a different place for him. Enforcing Hebrew,

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[32] Sayed Kashua, "Arab, Speak Hebrew: Sayed Kashua Searches for an Identity," *Ha'aretz*, September 5, 2012, http://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/sayed/1.1817934.

[33] Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia Checkpoint: The Historical Geography of a Non-Place."

[34] Abdelfattah Kilito, *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*, trans. Waïl S. Hassan (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 94.

then, is a way of moving through the checkpoint, of contesting the attempt to put him in his place by appropriating his native language.[35]

For the protagonist, who sees language as a means of avoiding a repeat of his humiliation, the encounter with the checkpoint produces a similar form of obsession with perfecting his Hebrew. He decides to disguise any trait that marks him Palestinian so that he can cross through the checkpoint unnoticed in the future. He shaves his mustache and buys new clothes from Jewish stores, but language is the most crucial element of blending in with the crowd. He always carries a Hebrew book with him on the bus; he also works to erase his Arabic accent. Specifically the telltale pronunciation of the sound *p* as *b* functions as a modern-day version of the biblical "shibboleth" and immediately marks a speaker as non-Jewish, namely Arab.[36] As he struggles to learn the *p*, his bible teacher instructs him to hold a piece of paper up against his mouth, and "if the paper moves, you've said a *p*."[37] The distinctively Hebrew letter, the *p*, moves the paper through an expulsion of air, while the *b* does not produce such movement. In learning to pronounce the *p*, the narrator also opens up the possibility of another form of movement, the ability to pass through the checkpoint without being blocked, pulled off the bus, and inspected. Indeed, he is successful. After the first trip in which he and Adel were removed from the bus subject to inspection, he says "they didn't even notice me anymore" and was never singled out on the bus again.[38] Thus it is in the movement, the

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Kashua, *'Aravim Roḳdim [Dancing Arabs]*, 75. There is no "p" sound in Arabic, so many Arabic speakers substitute the sound "b" for "p" when speaking English, Hebrew, or other foreign languages.
[37] Kashua, *Dancing Arabs*, 101–102.
[38] Ibid., 99.

rattling of the paper that accompanies the switch from *b* to *p*, that the protagonist is able to cross through the checkpoint, away from the father and into Hebrew.

It is tempting to consider the protagonist's efforts to disguise himself as Jewish to cross the checkpoint as a form of passing, which is defined by Elaine Ginsburg as the adoption and performance of an identity other than one's own in order to cross a racial, ethnic, or gender boundary and access the privileges afforded to members of another group.[39] This certainly opens up interesting fields of inquiry;[40] however, I have intentionally avoided this term in favor of "crossing" for a number of reasons. Crossing emphasizes the spatial element of moving across borders, of "crossing over" and "passing through," which reflects the focus of this chapter on the physical space of the border as a crossing point. Second, while passing generally denotes a unidirectional form of crossing, typically into a space or category that offers more opportunity and privilege, crossing allows for movement back and forth, a form of switching and interchange at the site of crossing. Finally, there is no precise term for passing in Hebrew, while crossing finds a roughly analogous term in the verb *'Avar*, meaning to cross or to pass through, which opens up a large, productive terrain of inquiry. The act of crossing through space and language produces a new literature of estrangement, a set of texts that emerge from those who remained in Palestine to create an aesthetic that reflects not the steadfastness of *ṣumūd* but the endless movement of interior exile.

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[39] Elaine K. Ginsberg, ed., *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 3.
[40] See for instance, Hochberg, "To Be or Not to Be an Israeli Arab."

Unpacking the verb *ʻAvar* and its related concepts will help further refine the way in which I deploy the concept of crossing in my analysis of Kashua's work. *ʻAvar* denotes passing in spatial terms, as in to pass *through* a particular location, or to cross. The place noun derived from this root, *Maʻavar*, refers to a "crossing point," or a checkpoint. For instance, the Qalandia checkpoint is known officially in Hebrew as "*Maʻavar Qalandia*," which suggests a space of passing through, rather than the blockage indicated by the other term for this space, *maḥsom*.[41] However, *ʻavar* also carries a temporal meaning: The noun *he-ʻavar* refers to that which has passed, i.e. "the past." This interplay between time and space suggests that we can read the checkpoint, *ha-maʻavar*, then, as the site of the intersection not only of different spaces but of different times. Also derived from the same root is *ʻIvrit*, the word for the Hebrew language. Its origin is unknown, but the shared root allows us to situate Hebrew at the point of crossing. Moreover, by switching (*haḥlafa*) two adjacent letters in *ʻIvrit*, *vav* and *resh*, we move from Hebrew to *ʻAravit*, the Arabic language.[42] Like the protagonist's movement from *p* to *b*, the switch of two letters stages the intersection of these two related languages. The switch between Hebrew and Arabic itself is a form of crossing, as *haḥlafa* derives from *ḥalaf*, which like *ʻavar* is a verb that means crossing or passing through space and time. This connection, in turn, allows the two languages to meet at an interchange, a *miḥlaf*. The interchange, then provides a site for the crossing, the switching, and the intersection of different spaces, times, and languages. Indeed, Kashua's novels repeatedly use both roots, in the terms

[41] For more on the maḥsom in Kashua, see Grumberg, *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature*, 130.

[42] The same exact switch of letters, incidentally, connects the two languages in Arabic. *Al-ʻArabiyya* becomes *al-ʻIbriyya* when the letters *bāʼ* and *rāʼ* are switched.

crossing (*ʻavar*) and switching (*haḥlafa*), to describe moments of intersection and crossing in space and language, a point to which I will return repeatedly in my analysis.

These meanings, and the movement across, through, and between these intersections of spaces and languages, does not occur on a merely abstract level, but must be grounded in the uneven power dynamics that produce them. Specifically, the checkpoint's official designation as *maʻavar* emphasizes the fact that the possibility of crossing is dictated by the exercise of Israeli power and spatial control over Palestinian movement, even if not immediately apparent. Eyal Weizman describes such a dynamic in his discussion of "passages," an unusual form of border crossing (*maʻavar*) produced by the Oslo Accords.[43] At these border crossings, Palestinian officials appear to run the border crossing, but the Israelis actually determine who has permission to enter. Weizman notes that being able to pass through is an important marker of Palestinian autonomy, but it operates under an invisible, overall Israeli control. Likewise, the act of crossing on a more general level occurs under Israeli authority, whether seen or unseen. Even the use of language switching or modes of disguise and passing, which on the surface offer a means of circumventing Israeli control, operates on an Israeli defined terrain. For a Palestinian, disguise, passing, and switching languages in this context means disguise as Jewish and switching into Hebrew. Thus even in light of these acts, the checkpoint forces Palestinians to define themselves in relation to Jewish Israelis.[44] The act of crossing is at once a willful act and one controlled by others.

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[43] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 139.
[44] Grumberg, *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature*, 137.

By emphasizing the fact that all of the forms of crossing outlined above occur on an Israeli-controlled terrain, we can see crossing as an act that imprints upon the person who crosses, that each instance of crossing produces gaps, distances, and dissonances. In the passage from *Dancing Arabs*, the protagonist's successful effort to perfect his Hebrew allows him to pass spatially through the checkpoint unnoticed, an act that reconfigures the checkpoint from a site of blockage, *maḥsom*, to a crossing point, *ma'avar*. It also allows him to cross time, from the model of resistance of his father's generation to a post-resistance moment staged at and through the checkpoint. However, while doing so it reveals that gaps and disjunctures produced at the crossing through an estrangement from the father and the suppression of the Arabic accent, the *b*.

In the next section, I trace a series of crossings through and across checkpoints, interchanges, and borders, between Hebrew and Arabic, and across periods of time. In these acts of crossing, I look for instances of estrangement, of ghurba expressed through imperfection, and silence that constitute gaps and dissonances. From these moments of disjuncture, we can reflect on the acts of crossing borders that produce them as a means of performing the task of denaturalizing these boundaries, and we can begin to read these gaps as the site of the emergence of a post-resistance Palestinian moment on the "inside."

Second Person Singular: The Silent Estrangement of Crossing

In *Second Person Singular*, much like *Dancing Arabs*, the act of passing through a crossing point, a point of interchange, produces movement between languages. One such instance occurs when Amir, the main character, decides to supplement the income he

earns as a social worker with a night job as a caretaker. He hears of an available position taking care of a Jewish man named Yonatan, who is in a persistent vegetative state and requires constant supervision.[45] The previous caretaker, a man from the West Bank named Ayub, meets Amir and takes him to Yonatan's home in the wealthy West Jerusalem neighborhood of Bet HaKerem. They meet at the Damascus Gate bus station in East Jerusalem, and travel to the western part of the city, crossing the former seam line that divided the city in two parts (Ayub darts across the street that marks this border). Once on the western side, they board a bus that will transport them to Yonatan's home.

As they board a crowded Jewish bus, Ayub abruptly switches (*'avar*) from Arabic to Hebrew. The bus is a space in which, as the passage above from *Dancing Arabs* shows, identifying oneself as Arab subjects one to suspicion and security checks. Ayub's use of Hebrew then, is an attempt to avoid and deflect attention. However, he speaks Hebrew a "heavy Hebron accent," so he is unlikely to fool anyone. [46] Amir is surprised by the unexpected switch to Hebrew. He marvels that Ayub did it as if it were the "most obvious thing in the world."[47] Yet the linguistic switch prompted by crossing from one side of the city to another produces gaps and imperfections. The "heavy Hebron accent" reveals the very information that would subject Ayub to the attention that he seeks to avoid, and reveals a form of compulsion that is implicated in the act of crossing. It is natural, automatic, likely motivated by fear of discovery. For Amir, experiencing this form of crossing for the first time, it produces a different reaction. He finds himself

[45] Sayed Kashua, *Second Person Singular*, trans. Mitch Ginsburg (New York: Grove Press, 2012), 80.
[46] Ibid., 79–80.
[47] Ibid., 79.

unsure of whether to respond in Hebrew or in Arabic, so he remains silent, hesitant, and anxious. The switch disrupts his ability to speak, revealing the gaps contained within and created by the act of crossing.

Amir's initial act of crossing the border that divides the city repeats itself in a variety of forms in the novel, as he moves from his day job in the East to caring for Yonatan at night. Eventually, however, he stages a final act of crossing by severing his links to East Jerusalem. He first quits his job as a social worker serving the city's eastern half, and then he moves out of his apartment.[48] He does not find a new place to live, but he stays at Yonatan's at night. This new state of homelessness does not produce anxiety, but rather brings a feeling of "calm" (*rigi'a*).[49] He cannot stay at Yonatan's during the day, so he buys a bus pass and wanders the city like a nomad, homeless.[50] He establishes a regular itinerary of his wanderings, like de Certeau's walkers, meandering through the city, its busses, parks, and restaurants and mapping the city through his itineraries. Yet after a week he decides his "endless wandering" is unsustainable as the cold Jerusalem winter approaches.[51] However, he has nowhere to go and the calm gives way to uncertainty as his act of crossing has rendered him homeless, severed from any form of home or refuge.

Though staged spatially in the previous example in terms of his homeless wandering through the city on a bus, the origin of Amir's estrangement lies in his

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[48] Sayed Kashua, *Guf Sheni Yaḥid [Second Person Singular]* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2010), 124.
[49] Ibid., 176.
[50] Ibid., 180.
[51] Kashua, *Second Person Singular*, 192.

childhood, which the novel traces in a series of flashbacks. As a child, Amir and his mother were forced to flee their home village and resettle in another locale, Jaljulia, because of a family conflict. Life in Jaljulia is marked by a clear and inviolable divide between local families and "strangers" (*zarim*). The term stranger refers to anyone from outside the village, even if only from the next town over, emphasizing the stranger's status as a figure that is not necessarily remote. Amir says, "I was a stranger (*zar*) in school, a stranger in the village, with a strange name (*shem muzar)* like all of the other strangers in Jaljulia."[52] The Hebrew term *zar* means both "stranger" and "foreigner," "one who is unfamiliar, one who is not a local, one who does not belong."[53] *Zar* suggests not simply one who is unknown, but one who is other. The related adjective used to describe his name, *muzar*, does not simply mean "strange" but also denotes something that is "bizarre" or "weird," something that is fundamentally out of place. To be *zar* is to be foreign, not local, a category that cannot be altered. Amir exists as a stranger within his own abode, the only home and village to which he can lay claim, which marks him as an estranged figure.

Repeatedly in the novel, Amir seeks to rectify this condition of exclusion by escaping into other places and languages. As a child, he faced endemic bullying. The other children would beat him on his way home from school, leave him threatening notes, and hurl insults at recess, referring to his mother as a "whore" and accuse her of "sucking

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[52] Kashua, *Guf Sheni Yaḥid [Second Person Singular]*, 97.
[53] Avraham Even-Shoshan, *Milon Even-Shoshan [Even-Shoshan Dictionary]*, vol. 2 (Israel: ha-Milon he-ḥadash, 2003), 505–506.

off" the principal.[54] This prompts his mother to take him out of his school in Jaljulia and to "smuggle" (*hivriḥa*) him into a Jewish school in nearby large Jewish city of Petach Tikva.[55] They stage an escape (*briḥa*) from the local school, imagining it as a type of prison or trap from which they cross out and away, towards Petach Tikva. There he is merely ignored, and he revels in his anonymity, which proves a relief after the bullying of his previous school: "The kids simply did not speak to me and I did not speak to them."[56] He finds a relieving form of solitude and silence. However, he also finds a voice through the language of his Jewish classmates. He devotes himself to mastering Hebrew, eventually learning to "speak like them" and to write better Hebrew than his Jewish classmates.[57]

However, after his stint in Petach Tikva, he is forced to return to his local high school, where his mother's watchful eye protects him. However, Amir increasingly distances himself from his mother beginning with his return to the school in Jaljulia: "That's when I started to keep my distance from her and today I regret that I can't so much as imagine a hug from her."[58] Though as an adult he still speaks to her and visits occasionally, he sees his relationship to her as estranged. In the act of crossing back and forth to and from Hebrew and a Jewish school, in the daily reprieves from bullying that this movement provides, it also creates another form of distance, the *ghurba* produced through a process of repeated, gradual distancing. The escape from Jaljulia and provides

[54] Kashua, *Guf Sheni Yaḥid [Second Person Singular]*, 251–253.
[55] Ibid., 123.
[56] Kashua, *Second Person Singular*, 129.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

a relief from Amir's status as stranger, but it also engenders new forms of estrangement. Amir's distance from his mother recalls the similar experience of estrangement from the father at the checkpoint experienced by the protagonist in *Dancing Arabs*. Amir's father passed away during Amir's childhood, and now he becomes estranged from his mother. The act of crossing back and forth, thus not only renders him homeless, but it also orphans him, producing multiple forms of estrangement through moments of disruption and unsettling.

The connection between crossing and Amir's orphaning and estrangement is further elucidated in a passage in which he travels from Jerusalem to his home village as an adult. He decides to visit Jaljulia in order to visit Umm Bassem, his surrogate grandmother, who is on her deathbed. At this point in the novel, Amir has been identifying himself as Yonatan for some time, but he must switch back to Amir as he returns to Jaljulia. En route from Jerusalem, he transfers from an Egged (mostly Jewish) bus to an Arab shared taxi at the Sirkin Junction near Petach Tikva. This crossroads functions as a transfer point on multiple levels, a space in which Amir not only changes modes of transport but also names and languages, and where the threads of language, crossing, and estrangement intersect.

Entry and exit into this crossroads is controlled by checkpoints and ID inspections. Amir shows his ID to a security guard as he disembarks the Egged bus, identifying himself as Yonatan.[59] Then, as the shared taxi departs for Jaljulia, it stops at a police checkpoint, where Amir shows a Druze policeman his own ID card, making sure

[59] Kashua, *Guf Sheni Yaḥid [Second Person Singular]*, 243.

to pull out the "right set of papers."[60] Amir uses switching and crossing to negotiate this crossroads, but within the terrain and on the terms of the authority that is present, the security guards and policemen who check IDs. This emphasis on IDs and documents recalls the airplane in al-Madhoun's novel, a type of "non-place." As described by Marc Augé, the non-place is a site of transit to which access is controlled by forms of identification and documentation.[61] While *The Lady from Tel Aviv* uses the non-place of the airplane to stage an encounter between Israeli and Palestinian, in *Second Person Singular,* the junction, this transit space, brings Amir and his alter ego, Yonatan, into close proximity, forcing them to cross paths. Here the non-place, the border zone, functions not as a site of the productive encounter with another, but rather as the site of *ghurba* that is produced through repeated crossings and interchanges.

The return to Arabic, and to the village proves unbearable for Amir and conjures up "bad and irrepressible memories."[62] As Amir passes through the junction and crosses from the bus to the taxi, from Yonatan to Amir, and from Hebrew to Arabic, he also crosses to a different time period, into his past and his suppressed memories. Now faced with the loss of his surrogate grandmother and his distant relationship with his mother, his journey back to Jaljulia is a movement back in time, to a place with which Amir's connections, like his suppressed memories, have been severed. The act of returning to this place, of crossing into an earlier time, into his memory, into his old name, serves to intensify his estrangement. For Amir this act of crossing is an unbearable experience, one

[60] Kashua, *Second Person Singular*, 267.
[61] Augé, *Non-places*, 94.
[62] Kashua, *Second Person Singular*, 265.

performed out of compulsion that necessitates exposing himself to bad and irrepressible memories, the estrangement he associated with Jaljulia and has long sought to escape. It is in this compulsive crossing of borders that the novel begins to articulate a literature of the *ghurba* experienced by Palestinians in Israel, written in Hebrew.

The estrangement produced by the fracturing effect of crossing and switching through this junction manifests itself linguistically. Amir boards the taxi to Jaljulia, he says, "I nodded at the drivers and mumbled against my will (*be'al korekhi*), '*Salām 'alaykum*.'"[63] He cannot bring himself to enunciate fully the Arabic greeting, and only does so at all because he must, out of compulsion (*korekh*). His switch from Hebrew to Arabic as he boards the shared taxi is a compulsive kind of crossing. He does not enunciate the Arabic greeting clearly but "mumbles" it, producing a suppressed, fractured language. Much like Ayub's heavily accented Hebrew on the bus, the taxi produces an imperfect form of language out of necessity. However, while Ayub's Hebrew appears automatically, almost unconsciously, Amir's mumbled Arabic reflects both his desire to suppress it and his inability to do so. Through his constant acts of switching, Amir has become conscious of the means by which borders and crossing points function, of the compulsive switching and passing through that they produce. In this way, attention to the border produces an awareness of the compulsive nature of this switching that denaturalizes it and shows it to be suppressed, undesired, and uncomfortable. This awareness, and Amir's ability to toy with the types of crossings he encounters and the

[63] Kashua, *Guf Sheni Yaḥid [Second Person Singular]*, 243.

checkpoints and crossing points that he traverses, prompts him to attempt to escape the estrangement that repeatedly produces and reproduces itself at the border.

ESCAPING ESTRANGEMENT

In one of the most powerful passages in *Second Person Singular*, Amir attempts to absolve himself of his status as stranger by transferring it to Yonatan but finds this task to be impossible. At this point in the novel, Amir has fully transformed himself into Yonatan, and he decides to make it permanent. Amir seeks to sever his connections with his former life and his mother tongue once and for all by burying Yonatan as Amir and adopting Yonatan's identity once and for all. Yonatan's health has begun to decline, and Amir and Yonatan's mother Ruchaleh collude to end Yonatan's life by depriving him of oxygen, then to identify the body as Amir and bury it in an East Jerusalem cemetery. As Amir and Ruchaleh implement their plan, Amir calls the cemetery to arrange the burial, and he asks for a minimal burial. Speaking in Arabic, he explains that there is no need for an elaborate ceremony because the deceased is a "stranger" (*gharīb*).[64] The text, rather than translating *gharīb* to the Hebrew *zar*, uses the Arabic word for the first time in the novel. Through this linguistic switch, he transfers the title of stranger to someone else, to Yonatan, and thereby attempts to rid himself of the estrangement that has plagued him all of his life.

The death and burial of Yonatan necessitates a new act of switching, which permits Amir to transfer the body from West Jerusalem to the eastern part of the city for

[64] Ibid., 290.

burial by ambulance. He must arrange transport the body from the morgue at Shaare Zadek, a Jewish neighborhood in West Jerusalem, to the cemetery in the Palestinian area of Beit Safafa, during which he must also switch Yonatan's ID with his own so that the dead body is buried under Amir's name.[65] He arrives at the morgue and identifies the body as Yonatan (and himself as Amir) in order to claim it, yet in order to transport it to the cemetery, he must identify the body as Amir, and himself as a Jewish Israeli. He stages this switch as the body travels by ambulance to East Jerusalem by speaking to the ambulance driver in Hebrew. This complex web of switching and transfers, however, places Amir in a bind. He has now transformed into Yonatan permanently, which necessitates the final switch to Hebrew and makes it impossible for him to speak Arabic.

The effects of this bind become clear upon the arrival of Amir and Yonatan at the cementer. The ambulance driver tells the undertaker, "he doesn't know a word of Arabic, this one,"[66] while Amir pretends he does not comprehend. The ceremony is abbreviated, at Amir's request. The deceased's status of stranger robs the ceremony of all of its dignity, as the gravediggers and even onlookers curse the unknown dead man. One elderly man yells, "Who is going to pray for a dog like that?" as Yonatan's body passes through the neighborhood. The undertaker encourages Amir to tip the young men who bury Yonatan, and one of the young men yells, "Yeah, let the little fucker pay." Amir pretends not to understand the insult and pulls out 100 shekels to give to the men.[67] To preserve his disguise as Yonatan, Amir remains silent, and listens to the curses that rain

[65] Ibid., 290–291.
[66] Ibid., 293.
[67] Kashua, *Second Person Singular*, 319–320.

down upon him and Yonatan's body with no reaction. The silence this moment produces, however, is distinct from the uncertain silence prompted by Ayub's unexpected switch to Hebrew, or the quiet relief Amir finds in his escape from his classmates' cacophony of insults into the Jewish school in Petach Tikva. Instead, Amir's silence at the grave is mournful, as he watches the young men bury him, as one of them "spat into the grave and laughed."[68] He gets in the car, preparing to leave, but he keeps returning to the men as they bury Yonatan. He cannot keep his eyes off of them as they shower him with curses, but he cannot speak, either. This experience unsettles him and the reader, as he watches the final indignities faced by the stranger, the ones he himself has born all of his life but is unable, and perhaps unwilling, to say a word.

In his inability to look away, he is unable to make the escape that he had planned, to leave his status as stranger buried in the grave with Yonatan. By watching Yonatan's funeral as Amir, Amir also bears witness to his own burial, the interment of a part of himself. Though Yonatan is now interred as the *zar*, the *gharīb*, the stranger is still named Amir, it remains an inescapable part of him. Amir's, and the novel's, switch to the Arabic word *gharīb* acknowledges the condition of *ghurba* that exists within the stranger. The text creates a moment of realization, in which Amir accepts his own condition of *ghurba* through the act of conferring it upon Yonatan. In this reading, the burial of Yonatan also stages the interrment of the possibility of *ṣumūd*, the potential for a form of political action from the inside. It declares, acknowledges, and mourns this loss as Amir looks on silently.

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[68] Ibid., 320.

Kashua also situates this moment of acknowledgement and mourning at the border. A final passage from *Dancing Arabs* will clarify this point and the means by which Kashua's work constitutes a literature of exile, of *ghurba*, produced at the border. The protagonist's father, once the faithful advocate of *ṣumūd* and resistance, loses his faith in his former ideals during a trip to Egypt: "It finally dons on him that Nasser is dead and that there isn't going to be another one like him."[69] On the journey back to Israel from Egypt, the father is detained at the border for hours, where the soldiers scream at him in "the most disgusting way." By crossing the border, first out and then back, the novel both stages the dissolution of the father's hopes for political action by confronting the failure of Nasser's dream, and, in the soldiers' abuse, reveals the form of internal *ghurba* that remains after the demise of this possibility. In these acts of crossing, then, Kashua's works produce new literature of *ghurba* from the inside, at the border, manifested in moments of realization, mourning, and disillusionment in the Hebrew text.

CONCLUSION

The production of exile at and through borders and the myriad means by which they are negotiated, crossed, and passed through in *Second Person Singular and Dancing Arabs* points us to an important point of congruence that emerges between Kashua's works and al-Madhoun's novel. Both stage the disruption of models and narratives of resistance at the border. In *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, the gaps and disjunctures of the border produce a set of intertwined yet conflicting narratives of return that go astray, rendering a narrative

[69] Kashua, *Dancing Arabs*, 224.

of the Palestinian interior (in this case, Gaza) from the position of exile impossible. Kashua's works take up where al-Madhoun's novel stops and assumes the mantle of narrating from the inside, a space that is itself partitioned, channeled, and blocked by myriad checkpoints, intersections, and borders. Yet it also stops at the border, the crossing point, becoming intertwined in a compulsive and estranging dynamic of incessant crossing back and forth. The awareness of this dynamic produces an attempt to escape it, but this ultimately fails. Thus if the border disrupts the return of the exile, it also disrupts the escape of those who remained "inside," stranding him in a place of exile at the border.

The border, therefore, becomes the meeting place of these two threads, a point of intersection produced through breakdown and exile that moves beyond the paradigm of resistance but becomes stuck at the border. It brings together Walid's helplessness as his narrative of return careens out of control under the bombs and stray bullets of Gaza, and Amir's silence as he watches from his car as he is buried under piles of dirt and indignity. This act of observing, of watching at the border from a position of exile, whether from the inside or outside or somewhere in between, brings us to the central concern of the next chapter, as I turn from the written text to the visual realm of film.

Chapter 4

The Illusion of the One-Way Mirror: Filming the Checkpoint in *Divine Intervention*

In a scene from Palestinian director Elia Suleiman's film *Divine Intervention* (*Yadd Ilāhiyya*; 2002), the main character drives through al-Ram checkpoint (*Ḥājiz al-Rām*) between Jerusalem and Ramallah. The character, a man named E.S. who is played by the director himself, passes from the Jerusalem side to the Ramallah side, and then he turns and parks his car in a lot adjacent to the checkpoint, where he waits for his girlfriend, who soon arrives from the direction of Ramallah. The scene provides a general overview of the characteristics of the checkpoint space, which is a crucial setting in the film: We can see the watchtower, the concrete and plastic barriers (*ḥawājiz*, from the word *ḥājiz*, meaning checkpoint or blockage) that direct traffic, a group of Palestinians walking through the checkpoint, armed soldiers manning the checkpoint, and military vehicles nearby. It demonstrates that E.S. is able to pass through the checkpoint, while his girlfriend cannot, but he stops there, and his destination is the border itself. He parks in a vantage point that allows him to focus his vision on the checkpoint. In this way E.S., and the discussion of *Divine Intervention* in this chapter, begin at the same point at which Walid and Amir end the last chapter: at the border, watching.

The scene uses camera techniques such as framing to remind the viewers of the constructedness both of the space of the checkpoint itself and of its filmic representation. The arrival of E.S. is shot from the within the car he drives, looking out and forward as if the camera occupies the position of driver or passenger, so the viewer makes the journey through the checkpoint along with E.S. The dashboard, sides, and tops of the front windshield are visible along the edges of the frame, which, along with the moving car, reminds us that we as viewers possess a limited line of sight, that what we see was carefully framed and shot. It also draws our attention to the fact that the viewer sees the events through a screen (on film), as we watch from the other side of the windshield. This perspective presents the viewer with the temporary, haphazard nature of the checkpoint. The concrete barriers and plastic cones appear hastily erected, as if they could be removed in a moment's notice. As E.S. drives through, there is an improvised, corrugated tin roof shelter against which a soldier leans nonchalantly, and the watchtower looks like it could be disassembled in a few hours. Finally, the rearview mirror is visible and shows the reflection of E.S.'s eyes, which reveals two, connected levels on which to read this scene. It shows the presence of E.S. as the director of the film, reminding the viewer that the scene is a constructed representation, on screen, of the checkpoint. However, seeing the eyes of E.S. also shows the checkpoint to be, as Eyal Weizman argues in *Hollow Land*,[1] a space that is constructed through dynamics of sight and vision.

This scene raises a number of questions about the checkpoint in *Divine Intervention* that animate my analysis in this chapter. While previous chapters have

[1] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 139.

examined borders through literature, the focus on film allows us to consider the issues raised by turning the camera on the border. We have seen how the border is narrated, and here I am interested in how it is framed visually. What does *Divine Intervention*, by foregrounding of the construction of the border as a space and as a representation, tell us about the border as a site of rupture and the possibilities of unsettling it? How does the act of persistently and intensively filming the border produce new modes of filmic representation that, like the works in the previous chapters, respond to the passing of the resistance moment in Palestinian cultural production?

In this chapter, I examine the film's sustained attention to the border by further exploring the relationship between the checkpoint as a space and as a representation in *Divine Intervention*. I begin by positioning the film in relation to contemporary Palestinian cinema as a body of work that seeks to grapple with presence of the border through film. I draw on works by Foucault, de Certeau, and Eyal Weizman to theorize the checkpoint as a space that disrupts, channels, and reroutes vision and lines of sight through constricted perspectives and one-way mirrors. I argue that the film uses this camera to depict the checkpoint as an unstable space constructed through visual tricks and illusion. I demonstrate that the film exposes the constructedness of the border through camera positioning and movement, shot sequences, and perspectives that tear at the seams of the film's fabric and call the attention of the viewer to its status as film. *Divine Intervention*, through these acts of filmic exposure, also turns the viewer to the constructed nature of the border space and the instability of the checkpoint as a space. I

conclude by suggesting that this instability constitutes a filmic form of the border aesthetic.

A CHECKPOINT FILM/FILMING THE CHECKPOINT

Elia Suleiman is one of the most recognized Palestinian filmmakers working today. Originally from Nazareth and therefore a bearer of Israeli citizenship, Suleiman lived for 12 years in New York City before returning in the 1990s, at which point he began his feature film career.[2] Subsequently, Suleiman has oscillated between Israel and abroad, living mostly in Paris. The result is a body of work that is not a cinema produced in exile, but one that nevertheless reflects a sensibility shaped both abroad and in Israel/Palestine. In addition to *Divine Intervention*, he has produced numerous short films and two other feature-length films. The first, *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (*Sijil Ikhtifā'*, 1996), tells the story of E.S.'s return to Nazareth from exile, while the most recent film, *The Time That Remains* (*al-Zaman al-Bāqī*), excavates the history of Palestinians in Israel from 1948 to the present through the eyes of E.S. and his family.

Like *Divine Intervention*, the other two films also revolve around a main character named E.S. who is played by the director himself and remains silent throughout the film, which Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi suggest reflects the effects of the events he witnesses, which "render him mute."[3] Many scholars have emphasized the humorous, absurd tone and amalgam of cinematic styles present in Suleiman's works and attempted

[2] Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 40–41.
[3] Ibid., 41.

to reconcile it with the gravity of the situation he depicts. Haim Bresheeth argues that Suleiman inverts fantasy and reality in order to comment on the absurdity of the "reality" faced by Palestinians.[4] Hamid Dabashi approaches Suleiman's "frivolity" as a means of "creatively retrieving the forsaken layers of memory and re-arranging them stylistically" in a manner reminiscent of Tourette's Syndrome.[5] In this chapter, however, I treat these characteristics as one (of several) elements that constitute the visual language of the film vis à vis the checkpoint.

Suleiman is a prominent member of what Gertz and Khleifi call the "fourth period" of Palestinian cinema. The films of the fourth period, in contrast to the previous era in which the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) funded films in order to "document and promote the national struggle,"[6] is defined by the works of individual filmmakers, often under severe budget and logistical constraints. This era of filmmaking can thus be understood as a post-resistance period, not in the sense that the concept of resistance is not present, but in terms of a body of works that is produced outside of the paradigm of mutual support that marked earlier relationships between filmmakers and resistance movements such as the PLO. The early works of Michel Khleifi mark the beginning of this period, and in the 1990s, Khleifi was joined by other filmmakers,

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[4] Haim Bresheeth, "Segell Ikhtifa = Chronicle of a Disappearance," in *The Cinema of North Africa and the Middle East*, ed. Gönül Dönmez-Colin (New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), 76.
[5] Hamid Dabashi, "In Praise of Frivolity: On the Cinema of Elia Suleiman," in *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, ed. Hamid Dabashi (New York: Verso, 2006), 142.
[6] Livia Alexander, "Is There a Palestinian Cinema: The National and Transnational in Palestinian Film Production," in *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Rebecca L. Stein and Ted Swedenburg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 154.

among them Rashid Masharawi, Hany Abu-Assad, and Suleiman himself.[7] The works of these filmmakers represent the first Palestinian films produced within historic Palestine since 1948.[8]

This return of Palestinian films to Palestine has produced an intensified engagement with borders through numerous filmic depictions of checkpoints in particular. Gertz and Khleifi situate *Divine Intervention* within an emerging genre of "roadblock films," other examples of which include Rashid Masharawi's *Ticket to Jerusalem* (2002) and *Rana's Wedding* by Hany Abu-Assad (2002). All of these films appear around the same time, toward the beginning of the Second Intifada, a period in which checkpoints were proliferating at a rapid pace. Gertz and Khleifi argue that these films reveal the ways in which these spatial restrictions preclude the representation of any type of cohesive Palestinian space.[9] While this is certainly the case on some level, the very interest of this body of films in the checkpoint suggests a need to further investigate the ways in which this particular space is constructed and represented on film, whether or not it is "cohesive."

The checkpoint lies at the center of *Divine Intervention* in a number of ways. The film consists largely of vignettes that revolve loosely around the silent main character E.S., as well as his family and girlfriend and takes place in a number of settings: The first part of the film offers a glimpse of life in Nazareth, the middle section centers on al-Ram

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[7] Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema*, 31–2.
[8] Alexander, "Is There a Palestinian Cinema: The National and Transnational in Palestinian Film Production," 155.
[9] Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema*, 152–153. For further discussion of the checkpoint in Palestinian film and in *Divine Intervention*, see Abu-Remaileh, ""Palestinian Anti-narratives in the Films of Elia Suleiman," 4–5.

Checkpoint, which divides Jerusalem and Ramallah,[10] and the end of the film is largely set in Jerusalem. The checkpoint generally occupies the chronological center of the film, but it also occupies the spatial center of the film, since al-Ram checkpoint lies between Nazareth and Jerusalem geographically. This reflects the outsized role played by the checkpoint, which has been described as the new Palestinian "living room," the center of contemporary Palestinian life.[11] The checkpoint functions as the site of repeated encounters between E.S. and his girlfriend in the film. As a resident of Ramallah, this unnamed woman cannot proceed past the checkpoint into Israel itself, so the couple meets under the watchful eyes of the soldiers manning the checkpoint. They spend hours sitting in a car parked near the roadblock watching the procedures at the checkpoint. The film repeatedly and insistently returns to the checkpoint, a repetition that emphasizes the crucial role of border spaces in this film. In order to elucidate this point further, I now turn to the relationship between the space of the checkpoint in "roadblock films" and the means by which it is represented, most notably the role of the camera itself.

The final scene from Hany Abu Assad's film *Rana's Wedding (al-Quds fī Yawm 'Ākhar*) will help us begin to elucidate the connection between the space of the checkpoint and the camera. The protagonist, Rana, is faced with an ultimatum: to get married or leave Jerusalem for Cairo with her father. She resolves to marry her fiancé on the day her father leaves, but the fiancé and the officiant of the wedding become stuck at a roadblock entering Jerusalem. Desperate to complete the wedding on time, Rana and

[10] It did divide Jerusalem and Ramallah, rather. Since the film was made, al-Ram checkpoint has been closed, and those traveling to Jerusalem now must travel through the nearby Qalandia checkpoint.
[11] Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia Checkpoint: The Historical Geography of a Non-Place," 36.

the rest of the wedding party rush to the checkpoint and conduct the ceremony there. The marriage takes place in a van in line at the checkpoint, in a brief, utilitarian ceremony. Then the wedding party exits the van to dance and ululate in jubilation in front of the checkpoint, as the sounds of singing and drums intermingle with the honks of cars and the roar of truck engines as they pass through the checkpoint.

Throughout this scene, the framing of the shots emphasizes the manner in which the checkpoint constricts and controls vision. As the wedding ends, the camera pans up and out. As the ceremony takes place in the limited space of the van, the camera cannot capture the bride and groom in one frame, so it must switch back and forth, creating a physical distance between them. Shot from the perspective of an onlooker, this sequence establishes the fragmentation of vision created by the checkpoint. Because of the restricted nature of the wedding produced by the checkpoint, it is impossible to see both bride and groom. Then, as the celebration takes place on the road next to the van, the camera slowly pans up and away, zooming out from the wedding celebration to show the lines of cars waiting to cross the checkpoint and the apartment buildings and abandoned lots that surround the roadblock. This sequence demonstrates the limited vision of those celebrating the wedding at the checkpoint by revealing the broader views that have heretofore been denied.

The use of the camera in *Rana's Wedding* reveals the constricted and fragmented vision of those subjected to forms of the panopticism described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault's notion of panoptic systems of discipline emphasizes the

importance of vision to the establishment and exercise of authority.[12] This principle clearly applies to situations like a prison, but it can also appear in myriad other forms such as surveillance cameras. In many instances, the inverse is also true: The person subjected to surveillance and control is deprived or constricted in their vision. The individual being watched by a surveillance camera cannot see who is watching, and the prisoner can only discern a very small portion of what the prison guard can see. This dynamic is at work in *Rana's Wedding*, in which the vision of the wedding party is highly circumscribed by the space of the checkpoint, both because it forces them into the enclosed space of the van, and in the limited lines of sight it produces after they exit. However, the camera itself is not necessarily bound by the same restrictions, as seen in the final shot. It floats above the checkpoint and looks down upon it, opening up the vistas around it unavailable to those on the ground, pointing to the possibilities offered by film and the camera for engaging with the limits of vision created by the checkpoint's panopticism. Here the camera provides a filmic iteration of the subversive practices described by Michel de Certeau and others.[13] An example of panopticism at work at checkpoints in Israel and Palestine, the system of "passages" referenced briefly in the previous chapter, will help further elucidate this point.

Eyal Weizman describes a system of border crossings into Palestinian territories that were established by the Oslo Accords that rely upon an unusual form of panopticism. At these border checkpoints, a traveler wishing to enter territory controlled by the

[12] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195–203.
[13] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

Palestinian Authority hands his or her passport to a Palestinian border patrol officer. Instead of stamping it, as one would expect, the officer slips the passport through a drawer in the counter and passes it to Israeli security officers, who decide whether to permit or deny entry and pass it back through to be stamped by the Palestinian officer according to their instructions. The Israelis are are situated behind one-way mirrors, which allow them to view the activities in the border checkpoint without being seen, establishing what Weizman terms a "prosthetic" system in which Israeli authority is exercised behind the illusion of Palestinian control.[14] Weizman also points to two cracks that open up in this panoptic system of invisible authority. He notes that late in the afternoon, the angle of the sun "makes the one-way mirror transparent enough to expose the silhouette of the Israeli security agents behind it, and with it the designed charade of prosthetic sovereignty."[15] Weizman also relates the experience of a photographer in the border checkpoint who, while trying to take a photo of a Palestinian border policeman, suddenly heard a voice shout in Hebrew, "Zuz!" ("Move"). Only then did he realize that there were Israelis behind the mirror, and when he tried to photograph the mirror he was removed from the checkpoint.[16] The presence of the camera exposes the panoptic illusion of the one-way mirror by causing the Israelis to reveal themselves. This pair of inconsistencies, of gaps in the panoptic apparatus permits us, moreover, to consider the camera not only as a way of moving above and beyond the visual constrictions of the

[14] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 139–141.
[15] Ibid., 159.
[16] Ibid., 138.

checkpoint, but also as a means of peering at and even through the glass of the one-way mirror to reveal the charade, the illusion that underpins its authority.

A scene at the checkpoint in *Divine Intervention* will help clarify the ways in which the camera can function in this manner. In this sequence, the checkpoint is filmed from the vantage point of E.S.'s car parked in the adjacent lot. The camera remains static in this shot of the checkpoint, maintaining a single frame, with the concrete barriers along the road on the left, with the watchtower on the right manned by two soldiers. Underneath the watchtower, is a Jeep with three men sprawled against the vehicle with their arms up as if they are surrendering to arrest or detainment, but the person detaining them is nowhere to be seen. Into this frame drives a car, and three soldiers emerge, wipe dirt off of their shoes on the road's curb in unison, in a choreographed fashion, and get back into the car and drive off. This sequence of events is interspersed with two brief shots of E.S. and his girlfriend sitting in their car that depict them staring forward toward the checkpoint.

The fixed framing and the *mise-en-scène* in this sequence, in alternation with the shots of E.S. and his girlfriend, give the scene a theatrical quality, as if the pair is the audience for a dramatic performance for which the scene's framing is the stage, and the soldiers and detainees who remain unmoving throughout the scene and the physical structures of the checkpoint provide the set. The soldiers who drive up are the performers, and their choreographed dance of cleaning their shoes serves to reinforce the theatrical, performed quality of this scene. Through this drama, the scene reveals the pieces with which the film is constructed and reminds the audience that the film is a representation. It

also depicts the checkpoint itself as a stage for choreographed dramas and performances. However, it is the shots looking at E.S. and girlfriend through the windshield of the car show the perspective that allows this choreography to be revealed. They remind the viewer that the camera's depiction of the checkpoint scene is also mediated by a window. The window, a piece of glass, recalls the one-way mirror described by Weizman, and the ability of the camera to expose and look through it. By looking through the window, the camera can perform an analogous act of exposure, making visible the charade of the checkpoint that the visual constrictions of this space often keep hidden.

The scene from Rana's Wedding and this scene show a number of ways in which the camera can circumvent the visual restrictions of the checkpoint. Thus while the scene from *Rana's Wedding* uses the camera's shots, framing, and movement to reveal the constriction of vision at the checkpoint, and the gap in perspective that appears between the act of traversing the checkpoint and the act of filming it, this scene in *Divine Intervention* also operates on a more reflexive level. The camera in its various deployments opens up fractures in the film's fabric by showing the elements through which the film is constructed. It stages a cinematic version of the ways in which *The Lady from Tel Aviv* fragments and opens up gaps in the return narrative. However, while in al-Madhoun's novel, the border produces these ruptures in the text, in the remainder of this chapter I show the means by which *Divine Intervention* uses these moments of fragmentation, of coming apart at the seams, to trace the instability of the checkpoint visually, on film.

UNSETTLING THE CHECKPOINT

In this section I examine a number of checkpoint scenes from *Divine Intervention* in order to trace the ways in which the camera, the *mise-en-scène*, and other visual and aural elements unsettle the panopticism of the checkpoint. I begin with the first scene staged at the checkpoint, which sets the stage for my analysis of the scenes that follow. This scene begins with the checkpoint as a chaotic space: Soldiers have closed the checkpoint, forcing cars to turn around and head back to Ramallah. Tempers have flared, and people are honking and shouting, and a soldier fires his weapon into the air to restore calm and control. Then the noise fades to silence, and the camera sweeps to a close-up of the bottom of a car door. The car door opens, and a woman's high heel steps onto the road, and the woman we later learn to be E.S.'s girlfriend emerges from the vehicle. Instead of turning around like the others at the checkpoint, she walks determinedly towards the closed roadblock. Well-dressed in heels, a dress, and sunglasses, she ignores the soldiers' warnings to turn back in badly accented Arabic, and instead keeps walking. As she ignores their order to halt, they aim their weapons and hone in on her, as seen in a shot from the perspective of a soldier looking through his gun's scope with her face in its crosshairs. Yet the woman raises her sunglasses and stares the soldiers down as she continues to walk, and they raise their weapons, unable to shoot. She continues walking and crosses through the checkpoint unmolested. As she passes the checkpoint's watchtower, the most tangible symbol of its authority and control, falls down. Her beauty stuns the soldiers but also knocks down the checkpoint, producing a moment of stunned

paralysis. Her captivating act of crossing shakes the foundations of the exercise of power at the checkpoint. However, the seeming triumphant collapse of the checkpoint as the woman passes through is followed immediately by another checkpoint scene that depicts the watchtower intact, revealing the fantastic nature of the collapse that preceded it.

The contrast between the collapsed checkpoint and its reconstitution imbues the scene with a surrealist tone, which is further heightened by a number of elements within the scene itself that separate its events from the normal operation of the checkpoint. As the camera moves away from the chaos of the checkpoint to the car, the noisy chaos of the roadblock is swept away by the sound of a whoosh of wind, and then an eerie silence. The woman is stylishly and classically dressed, like a white-collar professional who stands out in stark contrast to the dusty and chaotic checkpoint, creating a sense that she does not belong in this space. As she walks towards the checkpoint, a song begins to play in the background.[17] The song that is played, "Joi" by the British-Bangladeshi dance group Fingers, creates another point of disjuncture: It is a song one might expect to find on a dance floor, but not at a military checkpoint. All of these elements set this scene apart, they open up a gap between what we are conditioned to expect at the checkpoint (as seen in the first few seconds of the scene) and what is seen and heard on screen.

A closer look at the elements of this scene's structure points to a larger significance of this collapse, that it is not simply revealing the surrealism of the checkpoint's depiction, but also its status as a filmed representation. Several shots depict

[17] Suleiman's films are notable for their idiosyncratic soundtracks, which typically include an amalgam of different musical styles from across the world.

the woman as seen through the viewfinder of the soldier's gun as he contemplates shooting her, and her face appears in the crosshairs. This shot alternates with one from the perspective of her view as she walks towards the checkpoint, conveyed through the slightly unsteady movement of the camera. These unsteady shots recall the style of filmmaking most often used in documentaries to show events as they unfold in real time. This pair of shots is interspersed with a slow-motion side shot of the woman walking with poise and determination toward the checkpoint. The use of slow-motion here, in contrast to the shots from the woman's perspective, replicates techniques often used in an action film. The result is a scene that juxtaposes many dissonant filmic elements from different genres, from the slow motion of action movies to the unsteady shots of documentaries.[18] This dissonance points to an instability within the filmic representation of the checkpoint. It indicates an uncertainty towards how to depict it, an attempt to test out different modes and genres, but it also represents an instability within the filmic representation of the checkpoint space, a reading that is confirmed by the collapse and reappearance of the watchtower. In this scene, the camera searches for a means of adequately representing this space, experimenting with different techniques and genres, which creates a dizzying and often humorous form of dissonance. The question of how to represent the checkpoint, as I show in the following scenes, is a dilemma that courses through all of the film's depictions of this space.

[18] Scholars such as Haim Bresheeth have noted Suleiman's use of a mélange of cinematic styles. See Bresheeth, "Segell Ikhtifa = Chronicle of a Disappearance."

The instability this scene uncovers within the representation of the checkpoint allows us to consider the means by which this instability shapes the film's commentary upon the checkpoint as a space, and the significance of filming it. In another checkpoint scene, the camera functions as a means of communication from within the silent space of the checkpoint. The encounters between E.S. and his girlfriend occur frequently at the checkpoint, since the unnamed girlfriend's West Bank residency precludes here from entering Jerusalem, where E.S. resides. Their encounters are highly circumscribed. The only noticeable display of affection between the two is a very methodical type of hand-holding, in which the two hands slowly feel the other. The camera alternates between shots of the pair's upper bodies from in front of the car, looking through the windshield, and shots from the back seat, in which only the couple's hands are visible. The front shots show the sides and top of the car, framing the vehicle as a type of limit, only within the confines of which can the two be together. It portrays their encounter in a fragmented and disembodied fashion, the vision of both the characters and the viewers circumscribed by the panopticism of the checkpoint.

In addition to the physically confined space of their encounters, these scenes are characterized by long periods of silence, as the two sit and watch the checkpoint but do not comment upon it. The film also presents the checkpoint itself as a largely silent space. In contrast to the noise of passing cars and celebration at the checkpoint in *Rana's Wedding*, such sounds are notably absent here. The only people who speak at the checkpoint are the soldiers, either over a walkie talkie or shouting commands in the broken language that Sayed Kashua describes in the previous chapter as the "army

Arabic" of the checkpoint. However, while Kashua and his characters respond to this broken language by turning to Hebrew, Suleiman's characters remain silent. The checkpoint is a space in which speaking back is not permitted, in which language is suppressed or broken.

Instead, the camera offers a means of non-verbal communication. In one of their encounters, the two meet in the parking lot off to the side of the checkpoint, where they are able to sit together, unnoticed by the soldiers, in E.S.'s car, where they exchange glances but stay silent. It also creates a form of communication through a shot/reverse shot sequence between the two, creating an "implied conversation."[19] This sequence establishes a connection, a visual dialogue between the two that uses the act of looking at each other to produce a form of communication that is non-verbal, expressive, and intimate. The positioning of the camera and the framing of the scene establishes this form of communication visually. In the shot/reverse shot sequence, the camera alternatively occupies the position of E.S. and his girlfriend, providing the viewer with each character's vantage point towards the other. It uses closes shots to establish the proximity of the two and then cuts to a shot looking into the car, which reminds us of the circumscribed space in which their conversation occurs. This renders their visual communication a furtive and surreptitious act, but it also allows us to read it as a form of the "pedestrian street act" described by Michel de Certeau, in which people reuse imposed panoptic spaces for their own purposes.[20] Their communication circumvents the

[19] Abu-Remaileh, ""Palestinian Anti-narratives in the Films of Elia Suleiman," 5.
[20] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 98.

silence of the checkpoint from within the space itself, doing so quietly beneath the watchtower. Moreover, by staging it in the vehicle to the side of the checkpoint, beneath but away from the focus of the soldiers manning the roadblock, it opens up a gap in the visual control articulated by the checkpoint by positioning their communication as unseen by the soldiers. While the panopticism of the checkpoint relies upon the seamlessness of the perspective it provides, the all-knowing and all-seeing form of visual domination it engenders, the camera turns its attention the ruptures contained within the border, *ḥadd*, in order to pierce through and disrupt the checkpoint's control. The visual "speech act" in this scene marks the camera as a device of subversion, one that, as we will see in the following scenes, can open up cracks in the panopticism of the checkpoint, as well as the space itself.

The notion of the camera as a vehicle for exposing the limits in the checkpoint's panopticism brings us to the next scene of interest, in which *Divine Intervention* uses the intertwined acts of filming and watching the checkpoint to establish the camera as an entity that can control and destabilize the checkpoint. In this scene, E.S. has been sitting at the checkpoint for hours, and night has fallen. He watches the checkpoint silently from his car, and the checkpoint is framed in the same manner as the "stage" scene discussed above, with the watchtower on the right and a line of cars on the left. A soldier arrives in a jeep and tells the other soldiers to stop checking the vehicles waiting to cross, and he takes over. He walks among the cars waiting to cross and shouts commands at them through a megaphone, as the camera cuts to a closer shot that follows him as he walks back and forth. He begins shouting commands to those waiting in their cars to cross the

checkpoint into Jerusalem. First he tells them in Hebrew and Arabic to take out their ID cards and singles out one individual for ridicule, mocking him in a mean-spirited fashion. He forces passengers to switch cars, and he pulls a man out of his car and forces him to join him in a Hasidic Jewish dance as he chants the words "*'Am Yisra'el Ḥai*" ("the people of Israel lives"). Finally, the soldier allows the man to return to his car and waves the line of waiting vehicles through the checkpoint. Finally, while the soldier plays his games, the scene is interspersed with shots of E.S. in his car, observing the events at the checkpoint, which merges the viewer's vantage point with that of E.S.

This scene can be interpreted on two interrelated levels. First, we can read E.S. as character, watching intently as the events unfold before him. The camera moving back and forth replicates his experience observing the soldier's shouts and dances. Moreover, the staging of the scene at night, in darkness, as the other soldiers disappear from the scene, suggests an illicitness to the soldier's activities, or at the least, a desire not to be seen. Thus the presence of E.S. as an observer makes something visible that is intended to remain unseen, a means of looking through the one-way mirror. However, the framing and *mise-en-scène* also reveal glimpses of the scene's staging, as in the sequence discussed earlier. All of the events take place on the "set" established by the initial frame, and the dancing, choreographed, performance of "*'Am Yisra'el Ḥai*" recalls the theatrical nature of the earlier scene. Using these devices, the film gives the viewer a glimpse of the staging, of the constructedness of the events at the checkpoint, which allows us to read the scene on another level.

If we approach this scene as a staged and acted performance, then we can interpret the presence of E.S. not only as an observer, but also as the director of this performance, this film. By viewing the observations of E.S. in this way, we become aware that we are seeing the filming of the checkpoint from the perspective of the director. The camera replicates his perspective as he follows the performance of the choreography he set in motion. In this move from observer to director, moreover, we can interpret E.S.'s presence as an inversion of the one-way mirror at the checkpoint described by Weizman. The camera that E.S. as director controls films the checkpoint from the car, on the other side of the windshield's glass. Moreover, it does so unseen, watching a series of events that it put into motion. Thus the checkpoint with its staging, choreography, and dances functions as a charade, a performance of the functions of the checkpoint, and the director is the person behind the mirror. Thus the camera is actually able to get behind the checkpoint, the one-way mirror, and expose the farce that this space represents. It reveals the perspective that is intended to remain unseen, behind one-way glass. This allows the camera's role to go beyond a means of creating furtive communication, a visual speech act beneath the panopticon of the checkpoint, but rather to invert the panopticism of the checkpoint, allowing the camera to claim the position of visual control that choreographs the events of the checkpoint and to reuse it for its own purposes. This inversion establishes the camera and the film as entities that can control the checkpoint, stage it, and use it for its own purposes.

In a particularly humorous scene at the checkpoint, the film uses the power provided by this inversion to toy with the visual restrictions of the checkpoint. In this

scene, E.S. and his girlfriend sit silently in E.S.'s car. A quiet soundtrack begins playing, breaking the silence of the checkpoint, and with an expression of mischievous bemusement on his face, E.S. pulls out a balloon and inflates it. The balloon bears drawing of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's face with a goofy grin, clad in his trademark *kuffiyya*, and releases it through the sunroof. It floats toward the checkpoint, and the Israeli soldiers spot it but are confused, unsure how to react. One soldier trains his binoculars on the balloon and follows its path as it floats towards the checkpoint. One of them cocks his weapon in preparation to shoot, but his colleague restrains him and calls in a radio alert that warns that "there's a balloon trying to get through" the checkpoint. He asks for permission to shoot it down but is told to wait for instructions. Instructions never come, and the grinning face of Arafat stares back into the soldier's binoculars as it floats closer and closer to the checkpoint through a shot-reverse shot between the soldier's perspective and the balloon's. As the balloon crosses, E.S. and his girlfriend capitalize on the ensuing commotion and drive through the checkpoint unnoticed, finally allowing them to enter Jerusalem together. After the couple and the balloon cross the checkpoint, the balloon continues its journey, passing into Jerusalem. It passes by a series of panoramic shots of Jerusalem, and crosses the walls of the Old City. There it passes Jerusalem landmarks such the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and finally, it spins around the golden Dome of the Rock and comes to rest.

The film uses a number of cinematic and visual tools to use the balloon as a distraction to stage an illicit crossing, an infiltration that violates of the checkpoint. As the balloon floats towards the checkpoint, the camera alternates between the perspective

of a soldier looking through his binoculars and the perspective of the balloon itself looking towards the checkpoint, paralleling the earlier scene in which the woman crosses through the checkpoint but functioning in a different manner. As the soldier trains his binoculars on the approaching balloon, the viewer sees the round pair of circles that mark the edge of the binocular's field of vision. In a manner similar to the viewfinder of the gun in the earlier scene, this frame makes us aware of the limits of the soldier's vision. Despite his vantage point atop the watchtower, and the panorama it affords him, he can only see a small portion of the landscape around the checkpoint, a portion that quickly fills with the red of the approaching balloon. This framing also reveals of the constructedness of the film itself. By showing the edges of the field of vision, it reminds the viewer that the view from the camera is a representation, staged and framed in a particular way. However, the shots from the perspective of the balloon show that this representation can unsettle the checkpoint's visual power. As seen from the vantage point of the balloon, the camera floats up above the checkpoint's watchtower, looking back down and inverting the panoptic vision of this space as the soldiers look up helplessly, as the camera denudes the checkpoint of its ability to control the space around it.

The moment of crossing, in which the couple and the balloon move past and away from the checkpoint, stages a shift that opens up new spaces and new camera techniques. Up until this point, the trajectories and movements of both the balloon and E.S. and his girlfriend are staged from an interior and limited perspective: The viewer sees what the couple sees from inside the car, as well as the vantage points of the balloon itself and the soldiers looking at it, and the origin of each perspective is identified. However, after the

crossing, the camera shows both the car and the balloon from an exterior, unidentified perspective. The camera moves unbound to an identifiable object or perspective, and unmediated by the glass of the car's vehicle, and it opens up wide panoramic shots of Jerusalem as the balloon makes its journey. The act of crossing, then, stages the escape of the camera and the film from the confines of the checkpoint, unleashing an entirely new set of shots and perspectives, and newly available spaces outside of the stage-like set piece of the checkpoint. Through its camerawork and framing, the film works within the visual limitations of the checkpoint space to make possible an escape into wider spaces and vistas.

The shift in framing and perspective produced by the act of crossing the border points to a form of mimicking that appears repeatedly throughout the film's checkpoint scenes, in which the film reproduces or performs the visual effects of the checkpoint. The close shots from within the vehicle reproduce the constricted space of the checkpoint. E.S.'s observation of the soldier's performance from behind the windshield replicates the one-way surveillance upon which the checkpoint relies to function. The balloon floating above the checkpoint recalls the height advantage the checkpoint's watchtower offers to the soldiers watching the road below. However, this mimicry allows the film to move in the other direction as well and to comment upon the checkpoint as a visual space. By emphasizing unstable shots, limited perspective, and constructedness, *Divine Intervention* reveals the checkpoint itself to be a highly unstable constructed space. This instability returns us to the moment in which the viewer first encounters the checkpoint, the collapse of the watchtower.

This reading allows us to view the moment of collapse, then, not only as one that shows the instability of the checkpoint's filmic representation, but it reveals the instability of the checkpoint itself. The film performs this task by turning the camera on the checkpoint, by inverting and destabilizing the panopticism of this space. By doing so, *Divine Intervention* stages the ruptures contained within *ḥadd* cinematically. It creates a filmic aesthetic of the border, one in which the camera mimics the shaking, unstable, constantly moving nature of *ḥadd* as a means of unsettling, like a tremor, the steady permanence of the watchtower that surveys and controls those who cross the checkpoint. Through this act of unsettling, the border aesthetic points to the possibility, even if fleeting, of tearing the checkpoint down, or at the least, of escaping it into the wide open vistas of Jerusalem.

CONCLUSION

By staging on film the instability of the border, *Divine Intervention* performs an act of denaturalization. It shows the constructedness of the border space on screen as a means of commenting upon the instability of the space itself. Yet this instability cuts two ways: The checkpoint can fall down, but it can easily be rebuilt or replaced, as the fate of al-Ram Checkpoint, the site of the scenes in *Divine Intervention*, demonstrates. This checkpoint, which as depicted in the film, sat in between Ramallah and Jerusalem, and was the crossing point for many commuters, both those with permits and those who snuck through illicitly. This checkpoint was dismantled in 2009, and it was replaced not with an open road free of obstruction, but rather a wall and a set of obstacles that block

all passage, both legal and illegal.[21] In this duality, *Divine Intervention* offers both a possibility and a warning to those who find themselves stuck at the border, like Kashua's characters and al-Madhoun's authors, and now E.S. himself. It points to the potential of using the imposed position of being stranded at border spaces to circumvent, destabilize, and break them down. Yet it also reveals the limits of such possibilities, for as borders fall down other ones are constructed, particularly in the context of Israel and Palestine, where new borders are erected every day, and where even the dismantling of a checkpoint can lead to more restrictions, not fewer. This dilemma points to a paradox that animates the border aesthetic: the inescapability of the very space these works seek to contest and destabilize. In the next chapter, I turn to a number of works of visual art that explore this contradiction further.

[21] Tamar Fleishman, "Removal of Ar-Ram Checkpoint," *Machsom Watch*, March 14, 2009, http://www.machsomwatch.org/en/spotlight/removal_ar_ram_checkpoint.

Chapter 5

Re-Mapping Ramallah:

Reimagining Urban Space through Public Art

Figure 5.1: al-Manara Square, Ramallah. (Photo by author.)

The cultural and economic heart of Ramallah is a crossroads known as Al-Manara Square, where several roads meet in a roundabout in the center of the area's commercial district [Figure 5.1]. Al-Manara, which means "the Lighthouse" in Arabic, serves a number of purposes. It is a space for street vendors to sell their goods, it is a space for billboards advertising local and global brands such as Dell and Fanta, and it has served as the site of political protests, and their suppression, as well as displays of public artwork. Sleek coffee shops sit next to humble street food stands near al-Manara, and the square is policed by the nominally independent Palestinian Authority, though it is still subject to occasional Israeli incursions. It has all of the trappings of a public space that in the center of an urban area that has undergone rapid economic and political transformations, particularly in recent years. It is a microcosm for a series of apparent contradictions – globalized development and continued occupation, the material prosperity of an emerging middle class and high levels of poverty and inequality – that buffet Ramallah today.

The history of al-Manara reveals, however, that this square must also be viewed as a border space that functions in ways similar to other borders we have encountered in this dissertation, as a space of discipline, panopticism, and exclusion. Physically, it lies on a border, the line between Ramallah and al-Bireh, the twin towns that have come together to form the single urban area of Ramallah. Its origins lie in the British decision to construct an electricity switchboard, which would allow lighting (hence the name "the lighthouse"), and the choice of this site on the border of the two towns was intentional, as

Adania Shibli writes in her excavation of the square's history.[1] It diverted authority away from existing centers of power to a third site in between the two towns, which became the nexus of British colonial rule in the area and facilitated panoptic surveillance and the easy movement of military vehicles. Eventually the technology that required a switchboard became obsolete, and under Jordanian rule, as Ramallah was flooded with refugees following 1948, a monument to the city's "original" (and presumably more authentically local) families was erected on the same site. The monument was then destroyed by Israel for "security reasons" after 1967 (but reconstructed post-Oslo), but al-Manara remained the central site from which the occupation controlled Ramallah. Indeed, throughout its history, from the Ottoman era through periods British, Jordanian, Israeli, and Palestinian rule, al-Manara has remained a crucial site for the articulation of panoptic control.[2] According to Yazid Anani, the strategic location of al-Manara "enabled whoever controlled it to dictate the transaction of imagery, symbolism, meanings and spatial politics to the masses."[3] To this day it remains subject to heavy restrictions on its use for political purposes, requiring prior approval from the Palestinian Authority, the entity that now controls this site.[4]

In this chapter, I focus my analysis on two works of art that use al-Manara – the border zone that has become the heart of Ramallah – as the site of public interventions: "Al-Riyadh" by Yazid Anani and Emily Jacir, and "Projection" by Inass Yassin. I situate

[1] Adania Shibli, "Al-Manara Square: Monumental Architecture and Power," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 26 (2006): 59.
[2] Shibli.
[3] Shuruq Harb, "Interview with Yazid Anani," *ArtTerritories*, September 7, 2010, http://www.artterritories.net/?page_id=889.
[4] Ibid.

my analysis within a debate over growth and globalization in Ramallah and its implications for notions of resistance and struggle vis-à-vis the occupation. In contrast to the discourse of globalization as "borderless," I begin by theorizing globalization as a process that *imposes* borders upon Ramallah in the form of a new spatial order that regulates and controls the city in order to make space for development. However, this spatial order is contingent upon a series of blank spots, form of forgetting and ignoring the occupation. I elucidate this connection in my analysis of "al-Riyadh," a public intervention that consisted of a pair of billboards advertising imaginary construction projects in Ramallah that parody the discourse of development that is pervasive in the city. Rather than breaking down the limits of occupation, they suggest that development perpetuates and reproduces the spatial and discursive practices of occupation, particularly its use of walls, gates, and surveillance to create borders and zones of exclusion. These practices, in turn, produce a form of "double occupation" by obscuring and ignoring the presence and proliferation of borders. Then, I turn to the potential for public art to imagine an alternative form of spatial practice in Inass Yassin's "Projection," which attempts to reuse the blank spots within Ramallah's urban fabric by excavating the history of a defunct cinema house threatened by a construction project. Through the "failed screening" of a classic film at the site, she seeks to imagine a historically aware form of urban space that critiques rather than perpetuates the imposition of borders through occupation, development, and the exercise of power. However, I conclude with the limits of the intervention, which reveal themselves as both projects are defaced or censored within the border space of al-Manara Square. These limits reveal a vital element

of the border aesthetic by positioning the ability to cross borders and to access border zones as a condition that both permits and circumscribes the critique that these artists articulate.

MAPPING RAMALLAH

"Globalization" has arrived in Ramallah. The signs abound everywhere in Palestine's first "metropolis." New apartment towers rise in every direction. Banners herald new commercial developments and infrastructure improvements in the name of Salam Fayyad, the Palestinian prime minister from 2007-2013 whose neoliberal policies spurred an economic boom. The city's first luxury hotel, a Mövenpick resort "meant to look like the ancient walled city of Jerusalem," opened in 2010.[5] One can find sushi restaurants, bowling alleys, a branch of an American women-only fitness chain, and many other markers of an influx of foreign investment. This new Ramallah aspires to imitate Beirut or Dubai and views its fate as increasingly distinct from those of nearby Nablus or Jericho.[6] Signs of the continued Israeli occupation are apparent but easily overshadowed and drowned out by the construction cranes and jackhammers that herald the city's initiation into the global economy.[7] As Naomi Zeveloff writes, "Ramallah is a cosmopolitan city, in an entity without borders or currency, a burgeoning metropolis adrift in the murkiest of political waters."[8]

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[5] Naomi Zeveloff, "The Five-Star Occupation," *Guernica Magazine*, August 15, 2012, http://www.guernicamag.com/features/the-five-star-occupation/.
[6] Lisa Taraki, "Enclave Micropolis: The Paradoxical Case of Ramallah/al-Bireh," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 37, no. 4 (July 2008): 7.
[7] Ibid., 6–7.
[8] Zeveloff, "The Five-Star Occupation."

In this light, Ramallah appears to reflect the claim that globalization breaks down borders and renders them irrelevant. It produces what David Harvey calls a "time-space compression," in which technologies of communication and transportation reshape perceptions of spatial and cultural difference.[9] In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai posits that increasingly rapid flows of goods, people, and information create transnational, diasporic "public spheres"[10] that are replacing the "imagined communities" that Benedict Anderson argues constitute the nation-state.[11] This new imaginary heralds the decreasing importance of the nation-state and its boundaries as they are replaced with global affinities that bind the globe across all manners of borders in a utopian fashion. Yet in Ramallah, doubts creep out from behind the facades of the city's gleaming new towers. Some, like Guy Mannes-Abbot, have argued that Ramallah's growth is a form of denial, a means of "blocking off the view of occupiers and usurpers."[12] Others have noted that it allows one to forget the fact that Ramallah is an occupied city. Zeveloff suggests that the Mövenpick Hotel "had the effect of making the Israeli occupation vanish completely. I could have been in Abu Dhabi. I could have been in Tel Aviv." It creates a form of amnesia by providing a "a place to pretend that one is no longer Palestinian."[13] Yet the occupation and its borders still exist, unseen and forgotten. Ramallah has become a "five-star prison," a space of luxury but

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[9] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 240.
[10] Appadurai, *Modernity At Large*, 4.
[11] Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed (New York: Verso, 1991).
[12] Guy Mannes-Abbott, *In Ramallah, Running* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012), 27.
[13] Zeveloff, "The Five-Star Occupation."

one that still remains constricted, suppressed, and occupied.[14] Development in Ramallah, then, is less a means of breaking down borders than a means of forgetting them, and thereby precluding the possibility of resisting them.[15] It positions the post-Oslo moment in Palestinian culture as one that produces amnesia.

From 2005 to 2010, the city of Ramallah undertook the process of assigning official names to its streets for the first time, as a precursor to creating the first official maps of the city. Until this point the streets had names informally assigned by the city's residents. A committee chose names for more than 200 streets, naming them after local and international political and intellectual figures, friendly cities and countries, destroyed Palestinian villages, and original families of Ramallah. A sample of the mélange of names includes Picasso, Sigmund Freud, former French President Jacques Chirac, classical Arabic poet Abu Nuwas, and Dalal Mughrabi, a hero of the Palestinian resistance who died in a guerilla operation in 1978. In many instances, plaques in Arabic and English giving a brief biography or explaining the name's significance to Ramallah accompanied the names. According to Shuruq Harb, this process was "another cosmetic step towards organizing and regulating the city: trimming and grooming, which makes it user-friendly for tourists."[16] Indeed, one can now find several maps of Ramallah on the municipality's website, including a prominently featured "tourist map" (*khāriṭa*

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[14] Taraki, "Enclave Micropolis," 9.

[15] For more on the connection between memory and resistance, see Abu-Lughod, "Return to Half-Ruins: Fathers and Daughters, Memory and History in Palestine."

[16] Shuruq Harb, "All the Names," *Designing Civic Encounter*, 2011, http://www.artterritories.net/designingcivicencounter/?page_id=90.

siyāḥiyya) that marks important sites, lodging, and restaurants in English.[17] It is a clear attempt to "normalize" Ramallah and position it as a space that is available and open to investment, an impulse that has been given new impetus by the influx of global public and private capital.

As this project makes clear, the map is an object that represents itself in a certain way.[18] The map, thus, contains information not only about its "object" (the city), but about itself as a subject. While early maps represented themselves as "portraits" of a city, thereby acknowledging their origin from a particular point of view, later maps represent themselves as objective and universal. He continues that the modern map is a particular type of enunciation, a descriptive rather than narrative enunciation. It is constructed from a "gaze situated outside all viewing points, a synoptic gaze that encompasses and includes a stable order of places."[19] The god-like totalizing eye of the map, moreover, permits the city to be imagined from above and apart, creating what de Certeau calls the "utopian and urbanistic discourse" of the city.[20] Indeed, Marin suggests that the "objectivity" of the "synoptic gaze" marks the map as part of a larger utopian project. For while the map may claim objectivity and truth, it does not simply reflect the space it represents but it also contains "a transformative aim for a city and a vestige inscribed in the representation of its map, a design structuring its possible future and a drawing

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[17] "*Al-Khāriṭa al-Siyāḥiyya* [The Tourist Map]," *Ramallah Municipality*, 2012, http://www.ramallah-gis.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=xkwPSva1332454200axkwPSv.
[18] Louis Marin, *On Representation*, trans. Catharine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 204.
[19] Ibid., 207.
[20] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 94.

signifying its stages."[21] The utopian "perspectivist" map represents not only what is but also the utopia of what might and should be. This transformative vision imbues it with the power to mold and reshape social relations.

The utopian project of mapping Ramallah, then, should be understood less as an attempt to reflect the city's topography but to transform it. In his study of the history of maps in Beirut, Hatim El-Hibri describes mapping as a form of translation, a means of both knowing and shaping space.[22] For instance, the mapping of Beirut during the period of the French mandate made Beirut "useful to the purposes of capital."[23] However, the attempt to effect a similar transformation in Ramallah relies not only on what is mapped, but what is *not* mapped. In his discussion of *Utopia*, Marin shows that the attempt to map More's space reveals spatial incongruities, contradictions, and gaps.[24] If we look for the blank spots in the municipality's maps of Ramallah, we see that the occupation is completely absent from this representation. The map does not show the checkpoint that any tourist would have to cross to enter Ramallah, the settlement of Psagot that overlooks the city, or the closed military zones that surround the city. Like the amnesia seen in Ramallah's globalizing development, this map forgets and erases the condition of occupation by rendering it as any other city. While Marin argues that these incongruities on the map herald economic and cultural transformations that are to come, we can use this idea of blank spots in the map to further elucidate the ways in which works of art can

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[21] Marin, *On Representation*, 207.
[22] Hatem El-Hibri, "Mapping Beirut: Toward a History of the Translation of Space from the French Mandate Through the Civil War (1920-91)," *The Arab World Geographer* 12, no. 3 (January 1, 2009): 120.
[23] Ibid., 133.
[24] Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (London: MacMillan, 1984), 241.

fill in such gaps to reveal and critique the unmapped borders of occupation that still crisscross Ramallah, and to use these blank spots as spaces from which to contest their presence.

The notion of "heterotopia" as described by Foucault opens up the possibility of using such gaps and blank spaces productively. A heterotopia is what he refers to as "other spaces," sites that exist apart from everyday places. Heterotopias are tangible spaces, often in the margins, in which "all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."[25] They juxtapose different places and times within a single space. Heterotopias both reflect and contest the social and spatial practices of a society, and, importantly, Foucault argues that the existence of heterotopias is a means of preserving creativity and autonomy from dominant authoritative disciplinary practices.[26] Importantly for our purposes, Foucault repeatedly describes them as spaces "apart" from the everyday.

As a means of revealing and re-using the gaps between the naming and mapping project and the lived reality of Ramallah, Ramallah-based artist Shuruq Harb staged a public intervention called "All of the Names" (*Kull al-Asmā'*) in which she installed a plaque in front of the Ramallah municipality that lists many of the new street names. Harb states that she did so as a means of drawing attention to this process and causing people to think critically about and discuss the choice of names and what it says about

[25] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (April 1, 1986): 24.
[26] Ibid., 27.

Ramallah's changing urban fabric, aspirations, and self image.[27] By gathering the street names, which are diffused across the city, together in one place and juxtaposing them against each other, she abstracts them and makes explicit both the logic and the haphazard arbitrariness of the project. She displays the names at the site of the authority that imposes them, the municipality, which reflects the names' place in a larger project of ordering and regulating the city. By listing all of the names together, the famous and the obscure, the local and the foreign, she shows the choices to be random and arbitrary, of little relevance to the actual places upon which they are inscribed, a failed attempt to impose discipline and control.

The art project also undermines the effect of the ordering and regulating project by revealing the gaps in the naming and mapping program. In conjunction with the project, Harb interviewed residents about their thoughts on the new names. Some expressed pride that their streets now commemorate Palestinian heroes, while others found the names, many of which honor rather obscure figures, confusing. All were in agreement, however, that they will continue to use the traditional names instead of the new names, and many did not even know the "official" name of their own street. The mapping project's reinscription of the city has largely remained on an abstract level, unable to penetrate everyday practice. The interviews, and the project as a whole, illustrate a gap between the aspired utopian version of Ramallah and the lived reality of its residents, intervening in the blank spots to illustrate the dissonances and contradictions

[27] Harb, "All the Names."

that underpin this effort. As I will show in the following sections, attention to such gaps both reveals and contests the borders of Ramallah that remain invisible on the map.

"AL-RIYADH": GLOBALIZED DEVELOPMENT AS DOUBLE OCCUPATION

The first work of art I examine is a public intervention entitled "al-Riyadh" by Yazid Anani and Emily Jacir, both of whom produce art that is locally situated but also circulates on transnational art circuits. Jacir, who was born in Bethlehem, has created works of art exhibited across the Middle East, Europe, and the United States, and Anani is a Ramallah-based artist and scholar of architecture at Birzeit University who also has participated in international exhibitions. Anani and Jacir produced two advertisements promoting imaginary future construction projects, one a Dubai-style commercial tower, and another a high-security housing development. They then posted them in public areas in Ramallah, specifically the central al-Manara Square. This installation was intended to critique the pace and type of development underway in Ramallah with "the hope of helping to produce a city structure unique to Ramallah and Palestine."[28] I read "al-Riyadh" as parody in the sense described by Linda Hutcheon, who defines parody as a form of "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity."[29] It imitates what has become a normalized architectural discourse in Ramallah in order to denaturalize it along the lines described by Inge Boer.[30] The artists render the tropes of neoliberal growth, which are dependent on the utopian

[28] Harb, "Interview with Yazid Anani."
[29] Hutcheon, "The Politics of Postmodernism," 185.
[30] Boer, *Uncertain Territories*, 6.

discourse of ordering and regulating discussed above, into explicit visual and verbal terms that show that this form of development actually imitates and perpetuates the spatial practices of the occupation. They expose globalization as a (re)production of new and existing borders and portray Ramallah's ongoing transformation as a form of double occupation. It reveals the blank spots on the map, the gaps and silences within the discourses of globalization and growth that obscure the mutually dependent relationship between these processes and the perpetuation of occupation.

"Al-Riyadh" was part of a larger project called *Ramallah: The Fairest of them All?*, which is a series of critical and artistic works in 2010 that sought to provide a "self-reflection on the social history and contemporaneity of Ramallah, where art becomes a critical means of inquiry into the making of the city, its spaces, events, hopes and anticipations."[31] The curators of this project position it, thus, as a means of critically examining the relationship between the city's past, present, and future. Art thus functions as a means of complicating the history and cultural memory of this place. *Ramallah: The Fairest of them All?* is one of a series of exhibits on Palestinian cities at the Birzeit Art Museum, which "proposes to look beyond the stereotypical representations of nostalgia and folklore, juxtaposing past and contemporary visual and cultural evidence, not only to affirm the uniqueness of these cities, but also to challenge the issues of memory, identity and change."[32] This series attempts to negotiate the complex relationship of Palestinians to their cities, which in many cases are inaccessible, under blockade, or occupied.

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[31] Vera Tamari and Yazid Anani, "Ramallah - the Fairest of Them All?," *Nafas Art Magazine*, August 2010, http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2010/ramallah.
[32] Ibid.

Ramallah, with its simultaneous status as occupied city and recipient of large inflows of both public and private investment, represents an unusual and in many ways contradictory case, as the intervention "al-Riyadh" demonstrates. The first poster in the project, entitled "Riyadh Tower" (*Burj al-Riyāḍh*), parodies the images and language of neoliberal urban development in order to reveal it to be a destructive form of mimicry and complicity. The billboard depicts an imaginary proposed skyscraper to be built in the center of Ramallah. The glass and steel structure is evocative of the types of generic glass and steel architecture that has transformed globalizing Arab cities, most notably Dubai. Placed side by side with the type of architecture used in these cities, the resemblance is clear. The artists' tower mimics those found in places like Dubai and Doha, cities whose growth is built on the globalizing model of earlier financial centers like New York and Hong Kong. Through this invocation, they show the neoliberal project in Ramallah to be a form of imitation. However, they also place this imitation skyscraper within the context of Ramallah, as the building is depicted among the low-slung architecture of the center city. By doing so, they reveal the extent to which such a project is out of place within the context of Ramallah, a city with less than 100,000 residents where even new projects are typically no more than 10 stories. This outsized implant, moreover, is coded visually as an inaccessible space of exclusion. Its mirrored façade reflects the smaller buildings around it, reminding the viewer, like the one-way mirror described by Weizman, that the interior of this building is inaccessible and invisible. Indeed, there are no visible entrances to the building, an indicator that this structure does not engage with the streets and buildings that surround it but rather exists apart, secluded behind a glass mirror.

The accompanying written description of the project parodies the discourse of order and regulation that suffuses the exaggerated language of marketing and development from a marker of "modernity" and progress into a form of imitation, destruction, and complicity. The billboard emphasizes the extent to which such forms of development are types of mimicry, disconnected from local traditions and realities. The tower is described as an explicitly foreign space: "Burj al-Riyadh gives you the opportunity to mix with elite Arab and Gulf businessmen." It creates an international commercial center that taps into regional and global networks of capital, at the expense of its connection to the locale in which it is constructed and from which it is visually and conceptually severed, to the extent that even the country code for the phone numbers listed on the billboard is not Palestinian but Qatari.

The description also reformulates the notions of modern order that underpin Ramallah's development efforts. The billboard states that "al-Riyadh tower will allow you to realize your dream of walking on clean, shiny floors while shopping." This sentence offers the prospect of cleanliness and order as markers of modernity and prosperity, but it also trivializes it by reducing it to a comfortable shopping environment. It mocks the pervasive commercialization that such transformations entail, particularly the commodification of aspirations, as "dreams" become products and a clean floor. Moreover it states explicitly what is obscured in discourses of development by describing the tower as a "project of the destruction (*mashrū' tadmīr*) of the Ramallah/al-Bireh street market." Instead of a development project (*mashrū' taṭwīr*), Burj al-Riyadh is a destruction project (*mashrū' tadmīr*), thereby revealing the loss implicit in such

development. The passage thus simultaneously belittles the benefits and reveals the explicit costs of such construction projects. Moreover, it uses and mocks notions of cleanliness and modernization to show the consequences of transforming a highly localized space dominated by small, local vendors (the market) into a "shiny" shopping mall to be occupied by global chains. This imagined Ramallah market evokes similar transformations in Dubai, and in Beirut, where the development company Solidere rebuilt the Beirut *souq* destroyed during the civil war as an international commerce space dominated by global brands like Armani and Louis Vitton. The new sterile, global shopping center replaces an accessible public place – the market – with a zone of exclusivity, a private space for the "elite" that maintains no connection with its location in Palestine.[33]

Finally, the poster's description positions the proposed project as one that is complicit with and dependent upon the Israeli occupation. It notes "the simplicity of acquiring a visa from Israel for businessmen from Gulf countries." Given the extraordinary difficulty of receiving an Israeli visa for any purpose related to the Palestinian territories, the "simplicity" of acquiring a visa is only possible for projects undertaken with Israeli permission and support. Thus the claim to such simplicity is also an acknowledgement of the complicity with the occupation that makes such a project possible. Not only does such development engender complacency towards the occupation, it perpetuates and replicates the occupation by relying upon its support. This

[33] For more on the idea of a non-place, see the discussion in Chapter 2.

is the unarticulated, unseen gap that the intervention seeks to expose, a point that is further elucidated in the other half of the "al-Riyadh" intervention.

The second poster, "al-Riyadh Villas" ("*Ḍāḥiyat al-Riyāḍh al-Sakaniyya*"), extends the complicity argument even further. It claims that the Palestinian Authority and its commercial partners are not simply importing development paradigms from abroad, with Israeli support, but are also reproducing the spatial and architectural practices of the occupation itself. This billboard advertises a gated community of high-priced villas to be built on top of the center of the city. Visually and architecturally, the reference point for this ostensible project is much closer to home, but perhaps even more threatening, than the tower. The built space of this "suburb" resembles building styles most commonly associated with West Bank Israeli settlements. The rows of identical, red-roofed villas mimic the orderly architecture of the suburban-style housing common in settlements, as does its gated and protected nature. It transfers the spatial practices of the occupation, the building of settlements on top of West Bank hills, to the city center of Ramallah. The exclusionary spatial practices the settlements produce now appear within the city itself, represented by the walls and gates that feature prominently in the depiction and demarcate clearly defined borders between the inside and outside of the housing development.

The descriptors used to promote these "state of the art luxury villas" parody promotional materials for actual new developments in the West Bank. Descriptions of the new Palestinian city of Rawabi, under construction in the hills north of Ramallah, state that "Rawabi enjoys all of the elements of contemporary, modern cities" and describe a

city full of "parks and green spaces (*ḥadā'iq wa-masāfāt khaḍrā'*)." Likewise, Anani and Jacir's mock billboard extolls the lush "greenery" of the development and claims that "Al-Riyadh will bring you happiness and realize your dreams amidst high-level security protection." The description suggests a place in which one can reconnect with nature, but from the safety of a protected enclave that separates residents from the urban chaos and dirt nearby.[34] The billboard's text describes the project as one that will be built on the "ruins (*anqāḍ*) of Ramallah's historical center." *Naqḍ* indicates a form of negation, positioning the project as a repudiation of Ramallah's history. It reveals yet another blank spot, showing Ramallah's development to be contingent on the erasure of Ramallah's history as an urban space and an occupied space.

The poster also claims another form of reproduction of the occupation's disciplinary tactics in its description of the new homes as "luxurious and gated villas, equipped with the latest systems of security and surveillance (*murāqaba*)." The reference to surveillance gestures to the role played by Israeli settlements in monitoring Palestinian spaces and movements. Ramallah is no exception to this, as the settlement of Psagot lurks on a hill above the city, easily visible from much of Ramallah. Psagot, like many Israeli settlements in the West Bank, occupies a mountaintop, a fact reflected in its name, which is a Hebrew word for "peaks."[35] This vantage point from the high ground affords it a

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[34] The notion of modern comfort within sight of primitive chaos, which Weizman notes is an integral part of the marketing of settlements to Israelis, has seeped into the Palestinian discourse of development as well. Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 134–135.

[35] Weizman unpacks the nexus of agricultural settlement patterns, geological formations, strategic considerations, and legal maneuverings that led to Israel's settlement of many of the West Bank's mountaintops. He writes that if "one were to slice the terrain of the West Bank along an invisible horizontal datum line a few hundred meters above sea level, almost all of the land over this line was settler territory

strategic and visual dominance over the surrounding areas, an integral part of imperial practices of spatial control that allows it to function as a watchtower over Ramallah. The billboard's reference to surveillance (*murāqaba*) suggests that this development asserts an analogous form of visual dominance over Ramallah, for the root of the Arabic word *murāqaba* denotes not only surveillance but also control, supervision, and censorship. The presence of this faux-settlement, then, not only destroys a significant part of the city but casts a pall over the rest of it. "Al-Riyadh" shows, then, that Ramallah is subject to a double surveillance: the Israeli settlement of Psagot that keeps watch on Ramallah and the surveillance of Palestinian cameras from within. They portray Ramallah as a space subjected to a double occupation: From without by the walls, settlements, and checkpoints, and from within, by the settlement clones like the one depicted in the poster that have begun sprouting in Ramallah, creating their own set of walls, gates, and one-way mirrors.

The relationship between "al-Riyadh Villas" and settlements goes beyond one of architectural and discursive reproduction, however, and extends to a more intentional form of mutual support. The description states that the development's green spaces will consist of "parks and forests donated by JNF (the Jewish National Fund)," which the primary land development organization in Israel and is associated with Zionist efforts to acquire land from Palestinians for Jewish settlement, both prior to and following the

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annexed by the Israeli state; the valleys below it remained 'occupied territories'[…]The colonization of the mountain regions created a vertical separation between two parallel, overlapping and self-referential ethno-national geographies, held together in startling and horrifying proximity." Ibid., 117.

establishment of Israel.[36] This imagined development, thus, is to be constructed with the support of not only of an Israeli organization, but one committed to Jewish settlement of the land. Unlike many elements of the tower, this absurd aspect of the villas billboard is not merely imagined. In fact, Rawabi generated controversy for incorporating thousands of trees and other greenery donated by the JNF.[37] This implicit Israeli-Zionist endorsement of such a project serves as a reminder that the realities of occupation are such that these developments cannot be built without Israeli support.[38] Through this unspoken and unseen relationship, Anani and Jacir depict the forms of development seen in Ramallah today not simply as elements of a project to order, regulate, and modernize Palestinian space, but show that the very definition of these concepts being deployed is rooted in the perpetuation and replication of the occupation. The occupation, invisible on the map, is alive and well in the lived spaces on the ground that go unmarked. These blanks spots are, moreover, constituted by borders and zones of exclusion, from inaccessible buildings to gated and walled settlements, that create a double occupation. In this intervention, the border aesthetic emerges from both the walls, gates, and mirrors depicted in the art, as well as the border space in which it is situated. This duality reveals

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[36] The Jewish National Fund (*Keren Kayemet Le-Yisra'el*) is known for its forestation efforts in Israel, but it is also intimately linked to Zionist settlement efforts. It was established in Ottoman Palestine in order to buy and develop land for Jewish settlement, a role that it still plays today. It has been accused of discrimination for refusing to lease or sell its land to non-Jews, and it remains a significant landowner in Israel. Its forestation efforts have also been criticized for planting forests that erase the presence of Arab villages depopulated in 1948. Walter Lehn, "The Jewish National Fund," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, no. 4 (July 1974): 74–96.

[37] Tovah Lazaroff, "Rawabi Developer Says He Will Uproot JNF Donated Trees," *The Jerusalem Post*, September 2, 2011, http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Rawabi-developer-says-he-will-uproot-JNF-donated-trees.

[38] Armin Rosen, "A Middle-Class Paradise in Palestine?," *The Atlantic*, February 11, 2013, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/02/a-middle-class-paradise-in-palestine/273004/.

a contradiction within the border aesthetic: It relies upon the border and inhabits its gaps and ruptures in order to stage its critique of the very same space. Thus the attempt to contest the border is inevitably limited by its situation at the border itself, a point that I explore further in my analysis of "Projection," the intervention to which I now turn.

"PROJECTION": A CINEMA AS HETEROTOPIA

While Anani and Jacir exposes the blank spots in the map by revealing the ways in which Ramallah's development imposes, perpetuates, and reproduces the unmapped borders of occupation, Inass Yassin's public intervention entitled "Projection" uses a different type of blank spot as the site for the articulation of a historically conscious form of spatial practice that counters the amnesiatic and relentlessly contemporary focus of Ramallah's growth. Yassin is a Ramallah-based artist and director of the Birzeit Museum at nearby Birzeit University. Like Jacir and Anani, she has staged numerous exhibits abroad as well as in Ramallah and Jerusalem. In "Projection," which was also part of *Ramallah, the Fairest of them All?*, Yassin examines contemporary Ramallah's relationship with its cultural history with a planned public film screening of the classic Egyptian film *My Father is Up the Tree* (*Abī Fawq al-Shajara*, 1969) at the site of the defunct Cinema al-Walid, which was one of Ramallah's premier cinemas and gathering places during its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s. This project excavates and narrates the history of one of the city's important but forgotten cultural spaces and also reveals the borders – spatial and temporal – that the development of Ramallah creates and perpetuates.

Yassin's use of the ruined cinema to stage a screening reimagines the relationship between past and present and between the cinema and the city that surrounds it by transforming the cinema into a heterotopic space. Foucault uses the metaphor of the mirror to define a heterotopia as a space that

> makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.[39]

The cinema, likewise, is a "real" place connected to the surrounding spaces of Ramallah, but it is also unreal in that it is set apart both temporally and spatially from present-day Ramallah. Foucault points to the cinema, a rectangular room that projects a three-dimensional image onto a two-dimensional screen, as an example of a heterotopia that juxtaposes "several sites that are in themselves incompatible."[40] Yassin, by adding a temporal element to the spatial contrasts, creates a heterotopia that juxtaposes different times as well as spaces. It is at once the ruin we see today and the cultural space of the 1960s as reflected through the films it used to screen. By looking at the cinema as a heterotopia we can read Yassin's project as an attempt to reuse the blank spots on the map critically and productively.

Spatially, Cinema al-Walid functions as a blank spot within the urban fabric of central Ramallah. Situated on one of the streets leading to al-Manara Square and long abandoned, it was blocked off from the streets in which it was situated, surrounded by

[39] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.
[40] Ibid., 25.

metal walls with no visible indicators of its purpose or former importance. It was an inaccessible space, rendered invisible by the borders that surrounded it. Indeed, Yassin writes that she passed it every day for years as part of her commute but never noticed its presence until years later, as preparations began for its demolishment to make way for a new shopping center.[41] Its invisibility behind nondescript barriers, its existence as a blank spot on the map, makes it available for development. The blank spots on the map, then, not only produce amnesia towards the occupation and Ramallah's history writ large, but this amnesia in turn permits redevelopment of the spaces left off of the map, like the cinema. Yet in this case, the act of developing this site makes it visible by calling Yassin's attention to its existence, by unsettling the borders that set it apart from the city, and provides the impetus for a critical excavation of the site and its history, an attempt to fill in the blank spots.

"Projection" uncovers another type of blank spot within the cinema space, its forgotten history, and excavates this history in order to reestablishes a connection with the past in a manner that goes beyond nostalgia, and to offer a new vision of a historically conscious urban center that challenges the global and contemporary focus of present-day Ramallah.[42] Yassin portrays the cinema as a microcosm for the fortunes of Ramallah as a whole. Cinema al-Walid flourished during the period between 1948 and 1967, while the West Bank was under Jordanian rule, a reminder of the vitality that existed in pre-Israeli

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[41] Inas Yassin, "Projection: Three Cinemas in Ramallah and Al-Bireh," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 42 (Summer 2010): 49.
[42] "Inass Yassin," *This Week in Palestine*, October 2010, http://www.thisweekinpalestine.com/details.php?catid=11&id=3245&edid=187.

occupation Ramallah. After Ramallah fell under Israeli rule, the cinema began its decline, becoming a seedy movie house before closing its doors in the 1980s. It briefly reopened in the late 1990s until it was partially destroyed by Israeli forces during the second Intifada. When Yassin discovered its existence in 2008 its owners were preparing to demolish it and build a new shopping center, and she sought to draw attention to the space and its history before it succumbed to another wave of development.[43] Its decay, rebirth, closure, and threatened destruction parallel the ebb and flow of the occupation and the post-Oslo period and the imprint these eras have left upon Ramallah's cityscape. It functions not as a lost memento to be reclaimed but as a "powerful mnemonic for collective memory" that establishes "a presence that demands recognition."[44]

Instead of the destruction or amnesia that has often accompanied Ramallah's transformation, Yassin treats the past as a means of critiquing or reimagining the present. It uses the past to contest the limits of the present, unearthing the past as "a way of representing half-remembered things, perhaps long suppressed" that challenges the status quo and those who seek to maintain it.[45] She makes a claim for the importance of remembering urban spaces. Yassin situates the screening (the "projection") at the site of the former cinema, projecting the film onto the ruins of the defunct movie-house. This return to the ruins (*al-aṭlāl*), the traces of what used to be, evokes the Palestinian desire to commemorate and preserve the memory of other lost places, the Palestinian villages –

[43] Yassin, "Projection: Three Cinemas in Ramallah and Al-Bireh," 49–52.
[44] Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 259.
[45] Ibid.

and way of life – that vanished with the Nakba of 1948.[46] The imperative to remember these places, as I discuss in chapter 2, is central to Palestinian efforts to maintain their connection with the land and to keep alive the commitment to return. Yassin stages a similar form of commemoration for the ruined urban cultural space that demonstrates the need to think critically about the role of the city's past in shaping its present and future.

The parallel with Palestine's lost villages clarifies the consequences of forgetting: The imperative to remember has served as a clarion call and a precondition for commitment to liberating Palestine, particularly among younger generations of refugees.[47] Without memory, contestation is difficult if not impossible. Yassin's exhibition, then, suggests that remembering Ramallah's past can serve as a starting point for challenging the present condition of Ramallah. The relentless growth of Ramallah occurs on a neoliberal, globalizing capitalist model, one that is predicated on spatial and historical amnesia, as well as the decay that makes room for "renewal." In other words, it relies upon severing the connection between the past and the present. By reinserting the urban cinematic space into cultural memory and onto the maps of Ramallah, Yassin questions this relentless growth that destroys the remnants of the past, while also critically examining the type of nostalgia that the act of remembering can produce.

"Projection" further elucidated this relationship between Ramallah's history and its contemporary state by advertising the screening of *My Father is Up the Tree*.

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[46] For an in depth exploration of the relationship between memory and 1948, see Ahmad H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).
[47] Ibid.

However, the showing of *My Father is Up the Tree* that Yassin advertises never takes place, creating a "failed screening." The failure of the screening exposes the gap that remains between the history of this cultural space and its present state and shows that the film is intended not as a means of peering into the past but is rather a tool for reflecting upon the present. *My Father is Up the Tree*, starring Abd al-Halim Hafez and Nadia Lutfi, directed by Hussein Kamal, and written by Ihsan Abd al-Quddus, is a prime example of the Arab cinema that was culturally dominant at the time, which centered around Egyptian cinema's "Hollywood on the Nile," particularly in musicals.[48] Moreover, musicals were often the most popular type of film, and *My Father is Up the Tree* perhaps represents the zenith of this form, running for five months in Cairo alone. The 1970s, however, just a year after the release of this blockbuster, witnessed the decline in popularity of musicals.[49] Released soon after the Six-Day War, and right before the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser, *My Father is Up the Tree*, interweaves cheerful song and dance numbers that possess a "childlike" quality[50] with the story of a young man named Adel who, spurned by his girlfriend, rebels against his family and friends and becomes ensnared in a world of gambling, alcohol, and women, following a dancer named Ferdous (Paradise) to Beirut and then back to Alexandria. Eventually his father comes to save him, but he himself becomes entranced by a courtesan, provoking Adel's condemnation. The film has been read as a critique of patriarchy and Nasserist

[48] Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 104.
[49] Ibid., 105.
[50] Salah Ezz al-Din, quoted in Shafik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity*, 115.

authoritarianism, as the defeat of 1967 called into question the national leader as a kind of father.[51] *My Father is Up the Tree* depicts a rebellion against this system by the son, who, unable to rely on the certainties that previously guided him, becomes a rudderless, lost, and wandering figure who tries – and fails – to soothe his pain through the allures of women and booze.

However, while it may be tempting to read the film's narrative simply as a commentary on the decadence of a contemporary Ramallah that has lost its way, the "failure" of the film's screening complicates this comparison.[52] The past, and the example of the film, can shed light on the present but in a limited fashion. It provides an entry point into a critical examination of the present, but it cannot provide a solution or an answer, reflected in the decision not to screen the film. The project uses the cinema house to create a space for cultural and political critique of the present as reflected by the past, a critical project that draws attention to the gaps and blank spots of contemporary Ramallah by situating itself within them. It inhabits these border spaces, which creates new critical and aesthetic possibilities. However, the act of staging an intervention within the border zones also reveals the restrictions that constrict the art produced within these spaces. It is with these limits that I now turn to conclude my discussion of these works and clarify their relationship to the works examined in preceding chapters.

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[51] Joel Gordon, "The Slaps Felt Around the Arab World: Family and National Melodrama in Two Nasser-Era Musicals," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 02 (2007): 20.

[52] Many have done so, singling out Ramallah's vibrant night life as a signifier of the city's decadent numbness toward the occupation and its loss of political commitment in the post-Oslo, post-Arafat period. Taraki, "Enclave Micropolis," 12.

CONCLUSION: BORDER INTERVENTIONS

Both of the interventions discussed in the previous two sections situate themselves within the border space that represents the center of Ramallah, al-Manara Square. In "Projection," Yassin placed replicas of the original promotional flyer for *My Father is Up the Tree* in al-Manara Square to advertise her "screening," onto which she superimposed red tags that read "free screening at Cinema al-Walid, Tuesday July 13, 2010, 8 p.m." Likewise, Anani and Jacir placed the billboards of "al-Riyadh" in al-Manara Square. By doing so, both works seek to intervene in this space that is at once the center of public life in Ramallah and also a border zone, a site of the articulation and imposition of authority, to use it for political and cultural critique.

However, both attempts reveal the limits that this type of border space places on such critical efforts. Yassin's posters produced a strong negative reaction from passersby on the streets. The posters feature an image of a man and a woman in the throes of a passionate kiss. Indeed, *My Father is Up the Tree*, which features around 100 on-screen kisses,[53] is considered one of the most risqué Arab films. People responded by covering up the posters, tearing them down, and defacing them. The explicitness of the film and its promotional material, while controversial at the time of its release, did not preclude it from becoming a smashing box office success. However, the destruction of the posters demonstrates that what was acceptable (if not completely uncontroversial) in the 1960s is no longer appropriate for 2010, providing another reminder of the cultural transformations that have taken place here. Indeed, now films made in the Arab world

[53] Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 42.

rarely contain a single kiss, much less 100, in an effort to appeal to conservative markets and censors in the Gulf states and elsewhere.[54] Likewise, the creators of "al-Riyadh" also faced an act of censorship. Though the artists received permission from Ramallah officials to erect their display in July 2010, it was removed by the municipality within 24 hours.[55]

These attempts to stage artistic interventions in the border zone of al-Manara further reveals the limits inherent in appropriating the border as a space for subversive practice, as well as the paradoxes contained within the border aesthetic. These works of art are contingent upon the ability to cross and access borders, an act that by necessity entails a form of acquiescence to the authority of the border. Permission and with it a certain form of complicity is required, even if, as in the case of "al-Riyadh," the permission granted remains temporary and revocable, subject to the whims of borders and those who control them. To produce literature, film, and art at the border, then, is to acknowledge its presence even in the act of contesting it. This is the contradiction that animates and constricts cultural production at the border in the post-Oslo period. While specific borders and the particular forms they take are changing, unstable, and open to contestation, the border as a category remains ever present and inescapable. The works I have examined in this chapter, along with those in the previous chapters, reveal the extent of the loss left by the end of resistance as an organizing principle of cultural production. The vacuum it left behind manifests itself in the stray bombs of al-Madhoun's Gaza, the

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Ali Abunimah, "Ramallah Municipality Censors Artist Billboards," *Ali Abunimah*, July 13, 2010, http://aliabunimah.posthaven.com/ramallah-municipality-censors-artist-billboar.

ghurba that crystallizes in the humiliation and agony of crossing the border in Kashua's work, the checkpoint in *Divine Intervention* that collapses only to reconstitute itself, and the defacement and censorship of art in al-Manara. To write, film, and create art at the border constitutes both a commemoration of this loss and an acknowledgment of the fragmentation that has taken its place.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Palestine, Israel, and Beyond

> "Boundaries cannot be wished away but will serve their ordering purposes better – that is, without the lack of understanding and the ensuing hostilities that usually accompany them – if we accept their existence but take them as uncertain; not lines but spaces, not rigid but open to negotiation."
>
> – Inge Boer, *Uncertain Territories*[1]

If there is a particular salient point that can be extracted from the body of works I have examined in this dissertation, it is the inescapability of borders. They cannot be "wished away," as Inge Boer notes above. No amount of rupture, transgression, parody, disruption, crossing, subversion, or exposure can completely neuter, marginalize, or break down borders. From the vantage point of Israel and Palestine, this inescapability provides a contrast to both the optimism of resistance literature, which constituted a utopian project to reverse and negate successive Palestinian and Arab defeats at the hand of Israel, and the dream of globalization that seeks to move beyond boundaries of nation and culture and them irrelevant through the forces of technological and economic change.

[1] Boer, *Uncertain Territories*, 13.

From the vantage point of the works above, the imagined new world of what Arjun Appadurai calls "global flows" seems more distant than ever.[2] Yet to describe borders as "uncertain" and "open to negotiation" only tells part of the story. The description of these works as constitutive of a border aesthetic captures not only the engagement of literature, film, and art with borders, but also the fractures this engagement produces. These works are not only produced by, at, and through boundaries, but they also bear the indelible imprints of the border, a space that, as Anzaldua reminds us, scrapes, bleeds, and wounds with unrelenting violence.[3]

I have uncovered the traces, cuts, scabs, and scars created by the encounter with a broad range of borders. These traces appear in the form of new, unsettled, and disrupted types of language, narrative, and space. In Raba'i al-Madhoun's *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, repeated encounters with borders disrupt and fragment the narrative of return to Palestine, creating a new set of split, metafictional and "stray" narratives that unsettle the relationship between author and character and author and text. The novels of Sayed Kashua move from narrative to language itself as they unpack the relationship between crossing borders and language. Kashua's characters cross through borders, checkpoints, and junctions, but in doing so create dynamics of estrangement and silence that render crossing a compulsive and inescapable act that leaves one stranded at the border through a multilingual interplay staged in Kashua's Hebrew text. In Chapter 4, Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention*, explores the productive possibilities of being situated at the border,

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[2] Appadurai, *Modernity At Large*, 33.
[3] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 25.

by training the camera's lens on the border as a means of revealing the instability of both the border and its filmic representation. The instability of the border, moreover, opens up possibilities for critical interventions within the border's blank spots and gaps, as I show in the works of art I examine in chapter 5. However, the same instability inflects the critiques that the border permits, rendering them, like the space itself, ephemeral and fleeting.

In all of these analyses, I have shown that works of literature, film, and art repeatedly cross or circumvent borders only to find many more lurking, like a Russian Babushka doll. They reveal borders to be moveable, negotiable, inconsistent, and in flux, but still ever present. Moreover, the encounter with borders leaves traces on these works, which bear the scars of this encounter in the form of jumbled narratives, disrupted languages, unsteady cameras, and failed film screenings.

I have utilized the concept of borders to bring together a wide variety of texts that emerge from distinct contexts, locales, mediums, and languages. My analysis has joined an exilic Palestinian novel of return written by an author and journalist in Britain, a Hebrew-language novel and a bilingual television show written by a Palestinian citizen of Israel, a largely silent Palestinian film produced with support from three continents and filmed in both Israel/Palestine and France, and a bilingual set of art work produced by a globally engaged group of artists in occupied Ramallah. These works not only differentiate themselves from the forms of art that came before them, but from one another as well. Indeed, other than the general adjective "Palestinian," one would be hard pressed to find a category that encompasses them all. The categories of Arabic literature,

Hebrew literature, Palestinian literature, film, and art, all fail to account for the variety in this corpus. Based on these modes of categorization, these works are unconnected and perhaps even unintelligible. However, as I have shown, they are all heavily inflected by borders. By analyzing them through the lens of borders, I have used this space as a code, a means of traversing these gaps of language, representation, and form. Attention to borders uncovers the threads that bind these works together and translates them into mutually intelligible forms. The border aesthetic, then, not only describes works that emerge from and engage with borders and bear their traces, but that are bound together by these very same spaces.

The idea of the border as a code or a key to interpretation brings us to yet another contradiction that emerges from the encounter with borders, a crucial paradox that animates this dissertation: In a place of ubiquitous borders, both visible and invisible, a "hollow land" where enforced separation takes on increasingly labyrinth forms of partition and fragmentation, a place that produces a body of work scattered across locales, languages, ideologies, and mediums, the entity that binds all of these works together, that allows us to make some kind of sense of this cacophony, is *the border itself*. In this sense the border is constitutive of Palestinian experiences today. In the absence of a unifying struggle of resistance, a cohesive set of artistic forms, or a space in which encounter and exchange is possible, in an era in which a shared memory of disaster (the *Nakba*) no longer binds writers, filmmakers, and artists who were born at different times and places and have experienced distinct forms of tragedy, the border is a tie that binds.

Rather, they are all bound by the often violent and painful encounter with borders and the scars that they leave. In one sense, this state of affairs is a testament to a deeply rooted pessimism that has taken hold among those who seek to represent the experiences of being Palestinian. Yet it also shows the urgency of the imperative to consider borders from many different angles, and it serves as a reminder that sustained attention to these spaces, far from distracting from the lived experiences and difficulties of being Palestinian, allows us to focus our full attention on these hardships. An interest in borders permits us to look beneath the façade of a flourishing Ramallah to see the perpetually tightening vise of occupation, to escape the narrow focus of the return narrative to see the tragedy of life in Gaza, to discern the estrangement and loss engendered by compulsively inhabiting the border, and to uncover the precariousness that undergirds the seemingly impenetrable façade of the checkpoint.

A focus on borders also reveals a thread that not only links all of these works together but also links Palestine and Israel to the rest of the world, which brings us to the final point with which I conclude this dissertation. It is all too tempting to view Palestine and Israel as an outlier, an exceptional case that persists against the flows of time and progress. It is, in many views, a vestige of colonialism in an allegedly post-colonial age, a fortress of boundaries in an era of open borders, a place where walls appear after the fall of the Berlin wall heralded the demise of such barriers, a space of enforced monolingualism in a multilingual epoch, and a region where petty nationalisms persist in a trans-national world. Palestine is seen as the "unfinished business of a previous imperial

era."[4] It is a vestige of the past, the last gasp of colonialism. This subtext courses through much fascination on the region. It manifests itself in the extraordinary level of global interest that surrounds a rather small piece of land and in the plethora of authors, filmmakers, and artists who find themselves drawn to the mysteries, injustices, and paradoxes of this conflict.[5] It reveals itself in the ways in which the political cause of Palestine as been "popularized, pop-culturalized, and added to the style pantheon of the global left."[6] Many have attributed this outsized amount of attention to its status as a "unique case study,"[7] a place that is somehow set apart, different.

This very global attention given to the region, however, calls into question its status as exceptional. As it has been abstracted, commercialized, and appropriated, it has become a metaphor for a wide range of local and global issues, a proxy for other political and cultural conflicts. Yet if the case of Israel and Palestine has the power to animate and speak to so many concerns, can it really be so unique and alien from the experiences of the rest of the world? Indeed, my analysis in this dissertation points us in the opposite direction, toward Israel and Palestine as a place that is not an exception to global trajectories but rather the epitome of them, a place where transnational trends intersect and reverberate outward, taken to their logical extremes. The works I examine are multilingual and multimedia, and they participate in broader literary, artistic, and cinematic trends. *Divine Intervention* circulates in Cannes and other film festivals, though

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[4] Gargi Bhattacharyya, "Globalizing Racism and Myths of the Other in the 'War on Terror'," in *Thinking Palestine*, ed. Ronit Lentin (New York: Zed Books, 2008), 75.
[5] The most prominent example of this phenomenon are the works left by the world-renowned British graffiti artist Banksy on the West Bank barrier.
[6] Bhattacharyya, "Globalizing Racism and Myths of the Other in the 'War on Terror'," 74.
[7] Ronit Lentin, "Introduction," in *Thinking Palestine*, ed. Ronit Lentin (New York: Zed Books, 2008), 7.

not without difficulty, and Sayed Kashua's work speaks to the complexity of negotiating and crossing borders that reflect power relations governing a complex web of spaces, ethnicities, and languages.[8] The art of Emily Jacir and Yazid Anani engage with the challenges posed by global capital and neoliberalism around the world that are exacerbated and amplified by the occupation. That these forms of engagement coexist with the pervasive and constrictive presence of boundaries indicates not that Israel and Palestine are an exception to a global move away from borders, but rather points to the stubborn persistence of borders as relevant, perhaps even increasingly important entities long past their supposed expiration date. If Palestine and Israel are the exception, it is in a world in which the exceptional has become commonplace.

Perhaps, then, the region should be read not so much as a vestige of the past but rather as a premonition of the future, the precursor of a world in which, in Elia Suleiman's words, "Palestine has multiplied and generated into so many Palestines."[9] In this formulation, Palestine is not an outlier but a test case, a canary in the coal mine that presages a larger trend toward the proliferation of borders in an age in which they were supposed to disappear. Eyal Weizman, in *The Least of All Possible Evils*, describes Gaza as a "laboratory in more than one sense."[10] It is a space in which the strategies of blockades and imposing limits is developed, perfected, and prepared for deployment of

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[8] This is not just limited to multilingual societies and linguistic minorities, but also includes immigrants, writers who use former colonial languages, and many others.

[9] Sabah Haider, "'A Different Kind of Occupation': An Interview with Elia Suleiman," *The Electronic Intifada*, February 1, 2010, http://electronicintifada.net/content/different-kind-occupation-interview-elia-suleiman/8654.

[10] Eyal Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza* (New York: Verso, 2011), 96.

elsewhere. However, if the spatial practices and exercise of power in this region is a means of testing the imposition of limits, the border aesthetic opens up the possibility of a type of counter-laboratory, a space in which the possibilities and limits of engaging with a highly constrictive and pervasive set of borders can be tested, prodded, and pushed. If the works I have explored demonstrate the limits of strategies of parody, transgression, translation, and disruption that unsettle but never shake off the shackles imposed by and through borders to achieve at best a temporary respite, perhaps they can serve as a warning, a lesson that reverberates far beyond the contested borders of a small, conflicted land.

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